

21st Century Men of Grace:

Sober-Minded: Choosing Restrained Living in an Un-Restrained Culture Titus 2:6

Today, God asks for every man in Christ's Church to make daily choices to regain and maintain a sober-minded restrained life, surrendered to God's gracious sanctifying power. Open in your Bibles with me to Titus 2:6:

Likewise, exhort the young men **to be sober-minded** (NKJV)

The Greek word God inspires Paul to write is a verb **sophroneo** translated in the New Testament as "sober-minded" (NKJV/KJV); "self-controlled" (NIV/ESV); and "sensible" (NAS)". The meaning of this word is vital to our spiritual lives. This single word is what we may call the universal quality we all need to embrace, a life-long task of:

Restrained Living in an Un-Restrained World

We live out each day surrounded by doomed people who are not even aware of the judgment for their sin they will eternally face. To reach out and touch other's lives with God's power, He says we must seek His restraint in our lives.

In the space of just six verses here in Titus 2, Paul declares this habit of restraint is what God desires as part of the life of godly older women (2:4 NKJV "admonish"), godly younger women (2:5 "discreet"), godly older men (2:2 "temperate"), godly younger men (2:6 "sober-minded"), Biblical elders (1:8 "sober-minded"), and—to every Spirit-filled and Spirit-led believer (Titus 2:12 "soberly"; c.f. Romans 12:3 "think soberly").

This restrained and healthy mind is the only universal character quality of the 24 qualities we find listed in Titus 2:2-12.

So as you look at Titus 2:6 remember:

- Godly restrained living is the **only** spiritual choice God asked to be **personally taught** as what EVERYONE in Christ's Church should have.
- This is the first life-style choice for every younger man who wants to please God.
- This word sums up the goal of ministry by every older woman of grace who wants to please God.

- This is the only character choice shared by every man and woman in Christ's church.

The Greeks derived this word from two words, which mean literally **sozo** ("healthy or sound") and **phren** ("mind"). God wants all of His children to have healthy minds. Mental health is vital to our spiritual lives. All of our communication with God is spiritual (through our mind and spirit) and not physical.

So the communications pathway, the spiritual supply line and everything that has to do with God flows through our regenerated minds. This word sober-minded, or self-controlled, or sensible (however your Bible renders **sophroneo**), means: *to keep one's mind safe and sound*.

This focused and restrained living was the single character choice God wanted in every level of His Church. This is the only common denominator that describes what God expects from everyone, and that He personally promises:

His Grace To Empower

Look down at the end of this great passage in Titus 2:12, and notice that for the fifth time in this short passage, this word is repeated again down there:

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should **live soberly** [4995 **sophron**]¹, righteously, and godly in the present age" (NKJV)

A sober-minded man of restraint is a man ***with a mind surrendered to God's control***.

God is looking for godly, mature men who will make it a life-long goal to resist the temptation of self-absorption in all the activities of life and instead begin to seek what God desires for their lives.

People of Paul's day were immersed in a self-seeking, lust-feeding culture.

When they came to Christ they had to go on living in that world. To make it through life without getting neutralized, defeated, and sidelined, Paul starts with the key to godly living, which is:

Avoiding what Displeases God

In the world that the New Testament was written, saints learned that they had to avoid the overpowering culture of amusements. Most Roman citizens were drawn into the gaming world of spectacles in the arenas.

¹ This same word is found as an adverb (4996 **sophonos** adverb 1x: 'with sound mind, soberly, temperately, discreetly') further down in this chapter.

A non-stop calendar of events began in the capital city of Rome and soon went to the furthest flung provinces, of ever increasingly exciting spectacles: live gladiatorial fights to the death; and men vs. ravenous beasts; and beasts vs. beasts fighting to the death; duels, bloody deaths, shocking sights, and intense visual stimulation. The roar of the crowds became intoxicating and no one wanted to miss the events that often ran all day long for days at a time.

That is why Paul the Apostle wrote to a Colosse, city out in the middle of the most Roman province of all. In Asia Minor where the city of Colosse was located there were more Roman cities than in Italy, and more Greek temples than in Greece: there in the days of the Colosseum a letter was written to Colosse. Paul had a very simple command in chapter 3: choose where you will park your mind, and you choose your destiny.

Listen to his sobering words breathed out by the Spirit of God through Paul God's faithful servant:

Colossians 3:1-17 (NKJV) If then you were raised with Christ, **seek those things which are above**, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.** 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. 5 **Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth:** fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now **you yourselves are to put off all these:** anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. 12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Pray

The overpowering Gladiatorial gaming culture of the 1st Century that troubled, tempted, and weakened the early church has morphed into an even more alluring 21st century, irresistible, and almost inescapable culture that even the lost world is sitting up and sounding a warning cry about.

What is the Ultimate Temptation?

The ultimate temptation is anything that can distract us from God. We are to love Him most, seek Him first, program Him as our destination in life, set Him as the start-up page of our day, and tune our minds to listen Him.

All of those choices come back to our minds. Anything that can even slightly pull our minds regularly away from God is a temptation. Today we live with seemingly the strongest and most universal temptation since the days of Noah.

Have you stepped back and seen where the entire culture of both America and the world are heading?

The conservative, evolutionary columnist George Will wrote a fascinating indictment on the younger generation that is very much worth reading. Let me share parts of it with you, it is titled:

Lost in Electronica²

Can trout be bored? Can dolphins or apes? Are they neurologically complex enough to experience boredom? What might boredom mean to such creatures? Humanity can boast that it is capable of boredom, but there may now be an unhealthy scarcity of that particular brain pain.

Perhaps flight from boredom prompts people today to take refuge in constant stimulation by visual and audio entertainments.

Adam J. Cox is a clinical psychologist worried about the effect of today's cornucopia of electronic stimuli on the cognition of young boys. Writing in *The New Atlantis*, he says human beings evolved in a world of nutritional scarcity and have responded to the sudden abundance of salt, sugar, and fat by creating an epidemic of obesity. And, he says, the mind, too, now craves junk nourishment:

"Fifty years ago, the onset of boredom might have followed a two-hour stretch of nothing to do. In contrast, boys today can feel bored after thirty seconds with nothing specific to do."

The ubiquitous barrage of battery-powered stimuli delivered by phones, computers, and games makes "the chaos of constant connection" an addictive electronic narcotic. As continuous stimulation becomes the new normal, "gaps between moments of heightened stimulation" are disappearing; amusement "has squeezed the boredom out of life." For the hyper-stimulated, "the synaptic mindscape of daily life" becomes all peaks and no valleys.

² The costs of 'the chaos of constant connection.' George F. Will, August 14, 2010 <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/08/14/will-boredom-and-the-costs-of-constant-connection.html>

But valleys can be good for us. Cox believes that a more common occurrence of boredom in the young would be welcome evidence of “the presence of available resources for thought, reflection, and civil behavior.” Cox notes that “being civil is rarely fun—it requires patience, forethought, and some willingness to tolerate tedium.” So for the over stimulated, “civility feels like submission.”

Cox worries about the deficits in the communication abilities of young males for whom a “womb of all-encompassing stimulation” induces “a pleasant trance from which they do not care to be awakened.”

Hence, perhaps, the “failure to launch” of many young males who: “preoccupied with self-amusement,” struggle to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

“Unlike reading and listening to stories,” Cox warns, “the blitz of electronica doesn’t build deeper listening skills or a greater range of emotional expression.”

Self-absorption, particularly among young males, may be the greatest danger of immersion in the bath of digital amusement: “Not only does withdrawal into electronica enable them to bypass the confusion and pain of trying to give their emotions some coherence; it also helps them avoid the realities of being a flawed, vulnerable, ordinary human being.”

So “the silent, sullen boy at the mall’s game store may be next in line for an underemployed, lonely adulthood if we don’t teach him how to maintain effective social contacts with others.”

Cox doubts it is a mere coincidence that “the stratospheric increase in diagnosed learning and attention deficits” has correlated with “the advent of the electronic playground.” When so many Americans meet the diagnostic criteria for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, it “is arguably no longer a disorder at all—it’s just the way we are.”

Yes, “we.” Not just boys but adults of both sexes, too, seem insatiably hungry for handheld devices that deliver limitless distractions.

Neuroscience demonstrates that the brain is not a finished product; neural networks can be rewired by intense and prolonged experiences.

Some research suggests that the constant short-term stimulation of flitting to and fro among digital promptings can impede long-term memory on which important forms of intelligence depend.

We are in the midst of a sudden and vast social experiment involving myriad new means of keeping boredom at bay. And we may yet rue the day we surrendered to the insistent urge to do so. [607 words]

To the culture so much like ours today, Paul wrote two thousand years ago. But unlike the unsaved and uninspired George Will, Paul spoke the supra-cultural, timeless, and divinely empowered words of the Scriptures in Titus 2.

Paul says harness your wandering minds, look in your sights above, tune your souls to Heaven not Earth.

The universal application is that God wants all of us to be: serious about spiritual things; and God Wants all of us restoring others to serious spiritual living.

The Vital First Step

When Paul addressed the younger men in the church of the first century, he was talking to a world so much like our own.

God wants men who do not succumb to worldly influences that dull their mind. Any desire, unrestrained by God's grace can become an intoxicating idol. Things as harmless as: comfort, convenience, security, work, sports, and amusements—unrestrained by God's grace, can become as deadly and powerful as addictions to alcohol, drugs, and sex.

What happens to a man whose mind is not restrained by God? A mind that doesn't get set on things above (Col. 3:1-2) gets amused, carried along, floating with the current of the world going away from God. This doesn't mean that a believer immediately goes against God; rather, it is a slow process of the Lord having less and less influence over the priorities of life.

One writer expressed this condition well as he said:

It is one of the defining marks of our culture that God is now weightless.

I do not mean by this that God is ethereal, but rather that God has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life.

Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless demonstrate by their habits and beliefs that:

- *God **is less interesting** than television,*
- *God's **commands are less authoritative** than their appetites for affluence and influence,*
- *God's **judgments are no more awe-inspiring** than the evening news, and*
- *God's **truth is less compelling** than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies.*

That is weightlessness. It is a condition we have assigned God to, after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life.

Weightlessness tells us nothing about God but everything about ourselves, about our condition, about our psychological disposition to exclude God from our reality³."

God becomes weightless because we are:

Drowning Out the Holy Spirit's Voice

God speaks to us through His Word in what the Bible describes as a 'still small voice'.

God doesn't shout, nor does He push. He whispers and waits.

- Do you struggle to find time to think about God's Word long enough to apply it? Yet you have time for reading the news, emailing, checking financials, and sports? *That is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God.*
- Do you forget quickly what you read in the Word, and can't think of a way to apply it in your life, yet you are able to describe vacations, sports events, and your favorite movies? *That is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God.*
- Is your job, your finances, finding a girl or boy friend, or doing well in school more important than the Lord? Do you go to work, do your homework and excel at everything but your spiritual life? *That is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God.*
- Are you on a carefully devised financial stability and security plan, yet you always seem to never quite have enough time to let the Word into your life each day? *That is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God.*
- *What do you do first each day: check the news, read your emails, check your FaceBook or get into the Word? If its not God's Word first then that is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God.*

Reversing the Erosion

To be useful God wants a reverent mind and life. The only way to cultivate a reverent mind is to feel the weight of obedience to God's command that we first reset our minds Godward, as Colossians 3:1-2 exhorts us:

*If then you were raised with Christ, **seek those things which are above**, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind on things above**, not on things on the earth. (NKJV)*

Then with God as our homepage and target, we decide that it is our responsibility to throttle, weaken, and by God's grace: mortify our lusts, as Colossians 3:5, 8 tells us.

³ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a world of fading dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 88, 90.

Therefore **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 8 But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (NKJV)

To mortify means “to throttle sin and crush it in our lives, sapping it of its strength, rooting it out, and depriving it of its influence.” Mortification involves the cultivation of new habits of godliness, combined with the elimination of old sinful habits from our behavior.

The only way to recover from the irreverence of an eroded mind, a mind that has gotten neutralized, where evil seeps in a bit more each day, is to pursue personal sanctification:

To be a Sober-minded Man of Restraint: Abstain from Lust Building Activities

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, **abstain** from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, NKJV

If there are specific areas you know right now are sin, you must repent of them. **Stop now!**

Research has demonstrated that we store three trillion “videotape” images in our brain by the time we are thirty years old. But, worryingly, we have no volitional control over selective forgetting. Once the images are there, we must then live with the consequences of that visual imprint. Realizing that the graphic content of all those PG, PG-13, and R-rated movies is now irrevocably loaded into the memory banks of our minds should give us legitimate cause for alarm⁴.

To be a Sober-minded Man of Restraint: Starve Your Flesh

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision** for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. NKJV

Cut all supply routes. If there are magazines, videos, and so on, that are less than Christlike, destroy them. If there are avenues that defile, such as tv, cable and ungodly internet access, get rid of them. Do whatever it takes to starve the evil desires of your flesh, and those of your family. **Put on Christ!**

Have a *no-television* week or month. Don’t listen to the news perhaps for a week. Pray in the car instead of listening to the radio. Or simply enjoy the silence for a change. Cancel the newspaper or magazine. Create an intentional solitude⁵.

⁴ According to media expert Dr. Ted Baehr, teenagers watch fifty movies a year in the theater and view another fifty a year on video. Eighty percent of these movies are PG-13 or R-rated. Ted Baehr, “Miracle on Main Street?” *Focus on the Family*, April 1995, p.2.

⁵ “Do the things that once offended you now entertain you?” asks media critic Al Menconi. “Are you able to enjoy the company of television programs, videos, and movies that have values diametrically opposed to yours? Do you remember the first time you heard someone use profanity in a motion picture? I do. It was less than twenty years ago, in the movie “All the President’s Men.” I was shocked that they could use that word. Now we hear worse on television every night.” Al Menconi, “Our Collective Soul Is Dying” *Minnesota Christian Chronicle*, 16 February, 1995, p.6. This moral drift is important to understand, for it continues unabated. Extrapolate ten or twenty years into the future and it is frightening to imagine what media content awaits us.

To be a Sober-minded Man of Restraint: Saturate Yourself With the Word

After you read and ponder, work on memorizing key Scriptures that can help you have greater victory over sin, and then regularly meditate upon those verses. (See Appendix A for suggestions.) **Meditate day and night!**

Joshua 1:8 "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
NKJV

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. NKJV

Today, God asks for every man in Christ's Church to make daily choices to regain and maintain a sober-minded restrained life, surrendered to God's gracious sanctifying power. Or, to do nothing and slowly get lost in electronica and someday see your entire life was a loss for eternal good.

The choice is yours.