

CHAPTER 24

Self-Control

KEY IDEA

I have the power through Christ to control myself.

KEY VERSE

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.— Titus 2:11-13

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION

FROM DESTROYING GOD.ORG

It sounds so simple and straightforward, perhaps even commonplace. It's not a flashy concept or an especially attractive idea. It doesn't turn heads or grab headlines. It can be as seemingly small as saying no to another Oreo, French fry, or milkshake — or another half hour on Netflix or Facebook — or it can feel as significant as living out a resounding yes to sobriety and sexual purity. It is at the height of Christian virtue in a fallen world, and its exercise is quite simply one of the most difficult things you can ever learn to do. ... Self-control is simply that important, impressive, and nearly impossible practice of learning to maintain control of the beast of one's own sinful passions. ... Self-control may be the epitome of “easier said than done.”

Each of the different characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit focuses on how we respond to God and how we treat other people.

> Joy and faithfulness are expressed vertically – how we interact with God.

> Peace, patience, kindness, goodness and gentleness are expressed horizontally -- how we interact with others.

> And the fruit that is at the center is love, which has both a horizontal and vertical dimension.

> Mingled with the Spirit's fruit is the seemingly out-of-place fruit of self-control. This characteristic of a Christian seems to focus more on me than on my relationships with other people.

< We may think we can exercise self-control when all alone. But sometimes those hidden, private moments when no one else is looking is when we need it the most.

< Even with the aspect of self-control being focused on us as individuals, if we properly exercise this fruit, it will benefit those around us. In some ways, we might consider this virtue the most important because without self-control the works of the flesh cannot be overcome and the other elements of the Fruit of the Spirit will not be evident.

The mention of the term *self-control* undoubtedly brings to mind different images for people depending on their particular circumstances.

> It brings thoughts of combating dominating habits that can range from the simple to the more complex and debilitating.

< It may be as simple as a poor diet or a tendency to overeat, or talking too much.

< It may also be something far more serious like chain smoking, drunkenness, drug abuse, sexual sins, a quick temper, a pattern of exaggerating or lying, etc.

< It may be dealing with an abusive spouse, parent, or employer'

< It may be dealing with tendencies toward losing control and becoming abusive.

< It may be because people are lazy or have poor work habits while others are workaholics and need self-control to back off and learn to relax.

In our society where so much emphasis is placed on one's physical appearance, many exercise extreme self-control to maintain a beautiful appearance, but exercise little self-control when it comes to moral issues such as sexual fidelity or honesty in business.

Do you see this as being true about our society? Why or why not?

> For self-control to branch out into every compartment of one's life, one needs the spiritual dynamics of a deep relationship with God (See 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12).

Alongside love and godliness, self-control serves as a major summary term for Christian conduct. It is the climactic "fruit of the Spirit" from the list in Galatians 5:22-23.

> It seems that by reserving the mention of self-control to last, Paul is deliberately emphasizing it as the capstone of all the gifts/graces of the Spirit.

The very concept of "self-control" implies a battle between a divided self. It implies that our "self" produces desires we should not satisfy but instead "control."

> Self-control is the ability or power to rule or regulate our personal life so that we are neither driven nor dominated by the desires of the flesh.

> Passion, pleasure, and pride are the forces in the heart of humans that energize behavior patterns.

< Self-control means to be in control of one's attitudes or thought processes, desires or passions, and patterns or habits; so that they do not dictate behavior.

< Speaking scripturally, self-control is a matter of the control of the self-life from within by spiritual means. (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:20-23).

The idea of controlling self presumes these two things:

1. The presence of something within us that needs to be controlled

2. The possibility in us, or through us, for drawing on some source of power to control it.

"For the born-again, our hearts are new, but the poison of indwelling sin still courses through our veins. Not only are there evil desires to renounce altogether, but good desires to keep in check and indulge only in appropriate ways. -BBSBIBBEEON.ORG

> Christian self-control involves both control over our behavior, and our minds and our emotions.

< It's not just our outward actions, but our internal state as well.

True self-control is a gift from God, produced in and through us by the Holy Spirit.

"Until we own that it (self-control) is received from outside ourselves, rather than whipped up from within, the effort we give to control our own selves will rebound to our praise, rather than God's.

> Self-control is not a passive gift, it is an active one. We are not the source, but we are intimately involved.

One of the proofs of God's working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions. It's not that we are naturally weak-willed. But our fallen nature is under the influence of sin. The Bible calls it being a "slave to sin" (Romans 6:6).

> Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are incapable of knowing and choosing how best to meet our needs.

< Even if we knew what would be best, such as not smoking; another need, like comfort, would take precedence and enslave us again.

> Believers need self-control because the outside world and internal forces still attack (Romans 7:21-25). Self-control builds up defenses against those attacks.

> Whatever draws our desires and affections away from Christ and His kingdom will become our master and control our lives.

When we really see and believe what God is for us by grace through Jesus Christ, the power of wrong desires is broken.

> The fight for self-control is a fight of faith.

THE CALL AND THE CHALLENGE

God desires all of us to have self-control over things that can destroy us and others. The writer of Proverbs places options before us, clearly showing the virtue and benefit of self-control.

Proverbs 16:32 (CEV)

³² Controlling your temper is better than being a hero who captures a city.

If you're slow to anger, you possess an ability so great in God's eyes that it's more valuable than the ability to defeat an entire city!

> Contrary to those who would say it is good to vent anger, Proverbs advocates being in control of your temper/anger.

< This type of strength in the matter of self-control is contrasted with a person who is strong enough to take a city.

"I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self." -- ARISTOTLE

Proverbs 17:27 (CEV)

²⁷ It makes a lot of sense to be a person of few words and to stay calm.

Staying calm in a conflict is more easily done if we weigh our words carefully before speaking. Often an exchange of angry words can cause irreparable damage.

> Angry words are contagious. When they are thrown, more angry words are returned which heightens the conflict. In the same way, calmness and few words can be contagious as it sets the desire to resolve the conflict rather than escalate it.

Proverbs 25:28 (CEV)

²⁸ Losing self-control leaves you as helpless as a city without a wall.

In order to fully understand this fruit, it's helpful to describe what the absence of self-control looks like. Proverbs 25:28 provides a dramatic description of the individual living out of control.

> When the book of Proverbs was written, one of the main sources of strength and protection for a city consisted in the building and maintaining of walls. A wiped out wall was considered a breach in security. A city with walls in disrepair was a city with a shameful reputation.

> The man or woman who lacks self-restraint is like a city that has no effective defense. They are not able to resist those things that can destroy their lives and the lives of others.

< When occupants of a city for whatever reason neglected their own safety by failing to build and maintain strong walls, they would have been looked upon as a weak and foolish people. Likewise, when we forfeit the fruit of self-control, we are feeble and not very wise

> Self-control fortifies the inner person. It builds a wall of defense against destructive forces of sin and evil. Without self-control we become like a city that has no defenses, and it will lead to destruction.

Proverbs 29:11 (CEV)

¹¹ Don't be a fool and quickly lose your temper—be sensible and patient.

This verse would seem to say that it is a wise person that keeps their anger in check, until it can be given a proper vent.

> Fools are the ones that express their anger openly.

< A fool talks all the time and never has time to listen to anyone else and learn, because they never stop talking. They love to hear themselves talk.

< The wise person listens and considers everything; and doesn't speak until everything has been fully considered.

In essence, self-control means having power over one's own impulses, reactions and desires. Paul wrote a personal letter to his ministry partner Titus instructing him to appoint elders in the church gathered on the island of Crete. Self-control was a prominent characteristic Titus was to look for in these spiritual leaders. Paul also instructed Titus to call all believers of all ages to this virtue, which was obviously much needed in Crete.

FROM Titus 1:4-9 (CEV)

⁵ I left you in Crete to do what had been left undone and to appoint leaders for the churches in each town. As I told you, ⁶ they must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. Their children must be followers of the Lord and not have a reputation for being wild and disobedient.

⁷ Church officials are in charge of God's work, and so they must also have a good reputation. They must not be bossy, quick-tempered, heavy drinkers, bullies, or dishonest in business. ⁸ Instead, they must be friendly to strangers and enjoy doing good things. They must also be sensible, fair, pure, and self-controlled. ⁹ They must stick to the true message they were taught, so that their good teaching can help others and correct everyone who opposes it.

It is important that our self-control be evident in our home and family life.

*Do you ever find it is easier to be self-controlled in the work force, or with friends, than with family?
Why/why not?*

FROM Titus 2:1-15 (CEV)

^{2:1}Titus, you must teach only what is correct. ²Tell the older men to have self-control and to be serious and sensible. Their faith, love, and patience must never fail.

³Tell the older women to behave as those who love the Lord should. They must not gossip about others or be slaves of wine. They must teach what is proper, ⁴so the younger women will be loving wives and mothers. ⁵Each of the younger women must be sensible and kind, as well as a good homemaker, who puts her own husband first. Then no one can say insulting things about God's message.

⁶Tell the young men to have self-control in everything.

⁷Always set a good example for others. Be sincere and serious when you teach. ⁸Use clean language that no one can criticize. Do this, and your enemies will be too ashamed to say anything against you.

⁹Tell slaves always to please their owners by obeying them in everything.... They must be completely honest and trustworthy. Then everyone will show great respect for what is taught about God our Savior.

¹¹God has shown us how kind he is by coming to save all people. ¹²He taught us to give up our wicked ways and our worldly desires and to live decent and honest lives in this world. ¹³We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He gave himself to rescue us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. He wanted us to be his own people and to be eager to do right. ...

The best way to teach self-control is through example.

> The older Christians were to instruct the younger ones.

< This was not a case of "Do what I say, not what I do." They were to be "self-controlled, serious and sensible" and "behave as those who loved the Lord."

> Paul shows that self-control is resisting temptation.

< It means a discipline of emotional control – a balance of emotions and will.

< It means living in gentle strength, able to withstand the influence of the world and controlling natural urges.

Living the self-controlled life keeps Christians from providing any legitimate ground for the gospel to be criticized.

> This type of living shows the attractiveness of the gospel and helps to prove its power.

FROM THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

Paul gives the theological basis for the lifestyles he has described in vv. 1-10. Christians should live this way because the grace of God that saves also instructs its recipients to live in a new way. One cannot truly claim to be a recipient of saving grace without also being a pupil of "training grace." This change in lifestyle is rooted in the atonement and the expectation of Christ's return... (vs. 12) Saving grace teaches its recipients to say no to sin and yes to godliness. "In the present age" stresses that this godliness is to be lived out in the here and now.

To exercise "self-control" is to have godliness.

> One purpose of Jesus' death was to make his people holy.

< To forsake godliness is to give insignificance to the sacrifice of Christ.

< Redemption is tied specifically to living in a godly manner.

^ **"There is no room for claiming to be redeemed while providing no evidence of practical transformation."** (See James 2:14-16) (from ESV Study Bible)

MODELS OF SELF-CONTROL — BAD AND GOOD

During the days of the judges, the Philistines bullied Israel for forty years. As he did in the past, God raised up a special person, a judge, to deliver Israel from this oppression. God intervened in the life of a childless Israelite couple and enabled the wife to conceive and give birth to Samson, who would be used by God to set Israel free from this bondage. From conception Samson was a Nazirite — which comes from the Hebrew word meaning "separated" — and God blessed him with supernatural strength. As a spiritual and physical sign of this vow, Samson was to never cut his hair. Interestingly, this special man, one of the last judges of Israel, struggled mightily with self-control over his sexual passions; and ironically he was particularly attracted to Philistine women. Eventually Samson let his lack of self-control get the best of him.

See Judges 16:1-21 *Story Summary*

The story of Samson is one of great victory on one hand and tremendous tragedy on the other. Samson accomplished the purposes of God, but also failed as a role model for us today. Nothing is said of his obvious sins and lust that drew him away from his family and from God, but what we do know shows he lacked self-control in resisting the temptations of the world.

In Judges 13:2-14 we are told of the events surrounding the birth of Samson. Before Samson's mom even conceived him she received a visit from an angel. The angel said that Samson would be a Nazarite from the womb. The Nazarite vow, as outlined in Numbers 6:1-21. Defining points of a Nazarite is that, for the period of the vow, they would not eat or drink anything pertaining to grapes, they would not cut their hair nor come near a dead body. In Samson's case, the Bible says that his great physical strength was related to the fact that a razor was never used to cut his hair.

Contrary to what many people believe, Delilah was not Samson's wife. He was married to a woman from Timnath, a Philistine. Judges 14:4 tells us that Samson's marriage to her was so that God would rile up the Philistines against Israel. The result was Samson slew 1,000 Philistines in one battle. Samson then judged Israel 20 years during the time of the Philistine invasion (Judges 15:20). As a judge in Israel it meant that God used him to rule in various ways.

Samson met Delilah later. She also was a Philistine, from Sorek.

Delilah was approached by rulers of the Philistines who each offered her 1,100 pieces of silver if she could find the source of Samson's strength. She approached Samson and asked him directly for the source of his great strength and how the Philistines could overcome him. She told him exactly why she was asking! She may not have told the full motive behind her question, but that would be discovered soon enough.

Samson told her that if he was bound with seven new bow strings then he would have the strength of any other man (Judges 16:7). Samson apparently went to sleep and she was given the new cords by the Philistine rulers. She tied up Samson.

The Philistines came to take Samson and she woke him with the news. Samson rose and easily broke the cords. Delilah was probably frightened that she was caught in the deception; yet, her reaction was accusatory towards Samson. She accused him of not loving her (Judges 16:10). She asked again how he could be bound. Samson told her this time that it needed to be new ropes that had never been used. Of course, he easily broke those when the Philistines came in to capture him once more.

This took place two more times. The third time he said that she needed to weave seven locks of hair in a loom. She braided his hair and secured it with a pin. But Samson still had his great strength. The final time Samson told her the truth.

Samson got closer to the truth by telling Delilah to braid his hair. Then he told her the truth after several days of her nagging (Judges 16:16). Samson told her that his strength came from the fact that a razor had never touched his head. She knew from the look on his face that this was the truth. She had a man come while Samson slept and cut his hair. When Samson awoke he did not even know that the strength, nor the presence of the Lord, had left him until the Philistines had subdued him (Judges 16:20).

Samson was captured by the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and made a public spectacle of him. They took him to Gaza and made him grind grain in the prison house. The Philistines held a celebration. They rejoiced in the capture of Samson (Judges 16:22-25). Samson was called to be publicly displayed.

In his final act of judgment against the Philistines, Samson called out to God. He asked for strength one more time. He had a servant station him between two pillars of the prison and Samson pushed against the columns which brought the building down. The Bible says that he slew more Philistines in his death than he did in his life (Judges 16:30).

Though he did not always do what was right, God used Samson to bring peace and order to the country of Israel. How much better it would have been if Samson had obeyed the desires of God.

This story would have been much different had Samson been able to exercise self-control.

> Samson could have been one of the greatest leaders in Israel since Joshua if he had been true to God and his Nazarite vows.

< If Samson had been able to master himself through the power of God, he could have set an example of spiritual and physical courage that would be one of the finest in history.

> Samson is a portrait of self-destruction.

< As one of Israel's judges, the Spirit of God empowered him.

^ He was known for his strength and led God's people for 20 years.

< One of his primary tasks was to protect his people from the influence of the Philistines.

^ Instead, because he did not have self-control, he visited Philistine prostitutes and eventually told Delilah about the secret of his power. Lacking sexual self-control, he soon lost his hair, his strength and his life.

Unlike Samson, Joseph offers one of the best examples in the Bible of a man who exercised excellent self-control. Joseph was sold into slavery at the hands of his jealous brothers. The band of traveling merchants who purchased him took him from his home in Canaan to Egypt to be resold to an important official in Pharaoh's court. Although Joseph was punished by his captors for his self-control, God rewarded his faithfulness.

See Genesis 39:1-23 **Story Summary**

After being kidnapped and sold into slavery, Joseph found himself in the household of a wealthy officer in Pharaoh's service, Potiphar, who became Joseph's master. By hard work and intelligence, Joseph rose

through the ranks of the household slaves, eventually becoming overseer of Potiphar's household and estates. Under Joseph's supervision, everything ran smoothly, and Potiphar was left free of responsibility, able to devote himself to his one great passion, food. **'...he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.'** There is nothing wrong with enjoying food, but the implication of the text is that Potiphar had no interest in any of the other normal pleasures of life, including sex with his wife.

For a while, nothing happened. But during this period Potiphar's Egyptian wife, noticed Joseph. Since Joseph ran the household, Potiphar's wife was in constant contact with him.

She seems to have been a lonely, bored woman thrown into the company of an unusually handsome, attractive man. She realized that what she'd wanted out of life, and what she'd got, were two quite different things.

In Israelite and Egyptian culture, a slave girl was automatically assumed to be sexually available to her master (see Exodus 21:9-11). Potiphar's wife seems to have decided that a male slave should be available to her if she wished, as a female slave was available to her husband. But according to the Hebrew way of thinking, a woman was the exclusive sexual property of her husband.

She made some kind of sexual approach to Joseph. This was a straightforward attempt by a woman to use her sexual and social power to dominate a man, and as such it was definitely contrary to Israelite upbringing.

Joseph was in a delicate situation. He had to either offend the wife or betray her husband. He chose to offend the wife. The wife seemed to be in the grip of uncontrollable infatuation. She again begged Joseph to respond to her desire, but he avoided all possible contact with her, as far as he was able.

One day when they were alone in the house she again begged for his love. In the physical tussle that followed, she pulled off the linen cloth that was wrapped around him. Naked, Joseph ran out of the room and then out of the house altogether, leaving his cloth behind.

Suddenly, the passion she had felt for Joseph was transformed into unmerited rage. She had been humiliated by a slave, and she knew it. What was more, she knew that she had no-one to blame but herself.

In her escalating anger she lashed out at Joseph. She rounded up the members of the household and told them that she was attacked by Joseph, who had tried to rape her. She held up Joseph's loin-cloth to prove her point, suggesting that only her screams had prevented him abusing her. She waited until her husband came into the house, and told him the same story, blaming him for bringing trouble to their house in the form of this foreign slave.

Her husband was enraged - at Joseph? at her? The text leaves this question unanswered. He too faced a dilemma: should he discredit and divorce his wife and retain a valuable servant, one who has made his life much more comfortable, or should he believe his wife, punish the servant and thus lose the comfort and order he valued more than anything?

He (probably reluctantly) chose the latter course of action, forced by the fact that the incident was now common knowledge and that he would, as a husband of an adulteress, become the object of ridicule. His wife's concocted story forced his hand to send the man who had blessed his household to prison. He charged Joseph with the attempted rape of his wife, and put him in prison. This relatively lenient punishment suggests that his wife may have sought to fulfill her needs with other men before. Otherwise he could have had Joseph put to death.

NOTE: In Egypt, attempted rape was a capital offense and was even more serious if committed by a slave against the wife of a government official. Most prisons in Egypt were forced-labor camps, the kings prisoners were only under a type of house arrest while they awaited trial. Though they could not leave the compound, they did have considerably more freedom than ordinary prisoners.

While Joseph's refusal to lie with Potiphar's wife results in his being wrongly imprisoned, his personal integrity is not compromised. Because of his commitment to God, he was used in mighty ways.

> Joseph recognizes that to give in to Potiphar's wife not only would be an offense against his master, who has trusted him with everything he owns, but would equally be an offense against God.

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY: Vols. 8-9

Notice Joseph doesn't say... "how can I sin against your husband?" Nor does he say, "How can I sin against you?" He says, "How can I sin against God?"

This is what is known throughout Scripture as "the fear of the Lord." Joseph was in constant awareness of the "there-ness" of God—an awareness equally convicting and comforting.



FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

Self-control is an important factor in building character and preparing us for leadership. ... Joseph exercised self-control, but Samson used his body to gratify his own pleasures; Joseph ended up ruling on a throne, while Samson ended his life buried in a pile of rubble. (Judges 16:23-31)



KEY QUESTION: HOW DOES GOD FREE ME FROM ADDICTIONS AND SINFUL HABITS?

PARAPHRASED FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

There is a constant internal attack going on within us: temptation, thoughts, and attitudes flow through us, wanting self to be on the throne and get its way. But there is another influence we must deal with as well:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:15-16

The "world" is an external destructive influence on us too. These Scripture verses define the world as the lust from our hearts brought on from us wanting all we see, with pride as the ultimate root driving this problem. ...

Whether the motivation to place self first is coming from our internal source, an external one, or even both, the flow of communication is the flesh telling our heart what to do. The flesh is bossing, sometimes even bullying, the heart around.

So, then, what do we do? How in the world can we counter this constant attack?

We return to John 15. The nutrients of Jesus flow from the vine into the branch, producing his fruit, not our own. We remain in him. We choose God over self. We crawl off the throne and onto the altar.



In view of both the inward (our heart and physical passion) and external (the worldly appeals with outside temptations) stimuli, it is easy for people to develop life-dominating patterns that literally rule or have mastery over their lives.

THE HOW-TO'S

Sometimes the secular and religious worlds recognize the need of some form of self-restraint to bring ourselves under control.

> This often takes the form of human practices:

< Self-denial: (These are often forms of extreme denial. It is believed that the ascetic life releases the soul from bondage to the flesh.)

^ Non-christian faiths e.g. Buddhism and Hinduism practice this.

^ Some Christian faiths also practice this type of control especially in Third World countries.

< Legalism: Keeping a set of human do's and don'ts. This gives a false evidence of having one's appetites under control.

^ Examples:

}The Oneida Community.

}The Shaker Community.

> Paul knew that these types of practices were futile to man's problem. It was a faithless attempt that denied the completed work and provision in God through Christ. Colossians 2:20-23

From the Biblical standpoint, self-control is not:

1) Denying the reality of human pleasure, passion or pride.

2) Despising these God-given energies.

3) Trying to obliterate them by some form of self-denial.

> The issue is the spiritual management, control, and direction given through scripture, which is union with Christ, and enablement of the Holy Spirit.

"Sin comes when we take a perfectly natural desire or longing or ambition and try desperately to fulfill it without God. Not only is it sin, it is a perverse distortion of the image of the Creator in us. All the good things, and all our security are rightly found only and completely in Him. -AUGUSTINE

> Extreme desires for things outside the boundaries of godliness (greed, lust, materialism) become a form of idolatry. (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

Some lack of self-control comes from our desire for significance.

> Our compulsion for significance makes us vulnerable to verbal sins including: gossip, slander, boasting, lying, immoral conversations, unkind words, etc., as well as financial and sexual issues.

> It leaves us vulnerable to personal failures that complicate life and cause us to not function spiritually and socially.

FROM BIBLE.ORG

It may surprise you to learn that many people have affairs not because they are drooling with uncontrolled passion, but because for the first time in their lives someone has come along and made them feel significant during a time when they especially needed it.

We are quick to violate basic principles of stewardship and burden ourselves with debt to accumulate things that enhance our significance on the social scene. And to advance our significance in the marketplace we may violate our integrity as we exchange conscience and commitment to Christ for a significant title on our business card.

Significance seekers are unable to serve others unless there is an advantage to be gained, unable to sacrifice to advance a cause that is not their own, unwilling to suffer if necessary for another's sake, and unable to surrender to any agenda—corporate, family, or church—that impedes the progress of their pursuit of significance....

The Bible offers practical instruction on how to grow in the virtue of self-control. One of the primary applications is to "flee" — flee from the person, environment or situation that tempts us to lose control. In Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians, he instructed the believers in Corinth to keep themselves out of harm's way lest they fall.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (CEV)

¹² Some of you say, "We can do anything we want to." But I tell you that not everything is good for us. So I refuse to let anything have power over me. ¹³ You also say, "Food is meant for our bodies, and our bodies are meant for food." But I tell you that God will destroy them both. We are not supposed to do indecent things with our bodies. We are to use them for the Lord who is in charge of our bodies. ¹⁴ God will raise us from death by the same power that he used when he raised our Lord to life.

Christians have great freedom in the Lord. Paul is saying, "Why would I want to jeopardize by freedom by allowing a sin or a lack of self-control destroy that freedom?"

The Corinthians have adopted from the culture around them the idea that the body is permitted to have everything it craves.

> Paul knows that human desires are tainted with sin, which uses these desires to master the person for its own evil purposes.

¹⁵ Don't you know that your bodies are part of the body of Christ? Is it right for me to join part of the body of Christ to a prostitute? No, it isn't! ¹⁶ Don't you know that a man who does that becomes part of her body? The Scriptures say, "The two of them will be like one person." ¹⁷ But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one in spirit with him.

¹⁸ Don't be immoral in matters of sex. That is a sin against your own body in a way that no other sin is. ¹⁹ You surely know that your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you and is a gift from God. You are no longer your own. ²⁰ God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God.

Some of the Corinthian Christians were using prostitutes, theorizing that bodily appetites were matters of indifference for Christians just as they apparently were for everyone else.

> Paul reminds them that the bodies of Christians are one with the resurrected Christ and, in risen form, the Christian's body will be eternal.

< What they do with them now, therefore, is important.

> Unity with Christ is incompatible with all sin but particularly with sexual sin.

< Because sexual union has a spiritual component, sexual activity outside marriage is a unique sin both against Christ and one's own body.

< Within marriage, sexual union is not only allowed but has positive spiritual significance. (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:22-23)

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

The Corinthian culture held the position that the act of physical intimacy was nothing more than the satisfying of one's physical appetite—no different than the need for food. Not so, said Paul. Physical intimacy involves the coming together not only of two bodies, but of two souls—the very essence of one's person, that which belongs to God.

... Because we are made in the image of a triune God, we are comprised of three parts as well: body, soul, and spirit. The body relates to the physical world. The soul is one's essence, one's personality, and relates to people. The spirit relates to God and will live eternally. Thus each time

one engages in immoral activity, a part of his soul is permanently and irreplaceably forfeited. The tragedy, then, is that the one who continues to live in promiscuity becomes less and less of a person as a piece of his soul is stripped away with each encounter.

Comments?

Paul reiterated the charge to flee in his letters to Timothy, which he penned to give the young leader instructions regarding how to spiritually guide the church at Ephesus. He wrote about how to avoid false teachers and the lure of the love of money. He also urged Timothy and the church members not to keep company with people who will draw them into ungodly behaviors.

FROM 1 Timothy 6:3-16 (CEV)

³ Anyone who teaches something different disagrees with the correct and godly teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ Those people who disagree are proud of themselves, but they don't really know a thing. Their minds are sick, and they like to argue over words. They cause jealousy, disagreements, unkind words, evil suspicions, ⁵ and nasty quarrels. They have wicked minds and have missed out on the truth.

These people think religion is supposed to make you rich. ⁶ And religion does make your life rich, by making you content with what you have. ⁷ We didn't bring anything into this world, and we won't take anything with us when we leave. ⁸ So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes. ⁹ People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them. ¹⁰ The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.

¹¹ Timothy, you belong to God, so keep away from all these evil things. Try your best to please God and to be like him. Be faithful, loving, dependable, and gentle. ¹² Fight a good fight for the faith and claim eternal life. ...

The love of money can lead to pointless pursuits and pain. Those who place money above their spiritual responsibilities indulge themselves with possessions they ought not have and places they ought not be.

> Our focus needs to be on the spiritual, not the material.

FROM 2 Timothy 2:22-3:7 (CEV)

^{2:22} Run from temptations that capture young people. Always do the right thing. ...

^{3:1} You can be certain that in the last days there will be some very hard times. ² People will love only themselves and money. They will be proud, stuck-up, rude, and disobedient to their parents. They will also be ungrateful, godless, ³ heartless, and hateful. Their words will be cruel, and they will have no self-control or pity. These people will hate everything that is good. ⁴ They will be sneaky, reckless, and puffed up with pride. Instead of loving God, they will love pleasure. ⁵ Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real. Don't have anything to do with such people. ...

When we struggle with something, if we don't flee from the situation, we're going to be tempted again and even more heavily than the first.

> We are to turn away from those that participate in sinful activities and would encourage us to join them.



A second strategy, also defensive in nature, in the fight to preserve self-control is to resist. We can tame our tongues, reduce fights and quarrels amongst us, control our selfish desires, and mitigate against the negative influence of the world and the devil. But ultimately complete self-control is unattainable. Our sin nature, or flesh, eventually wears us down and gets the best of us. The ultimate solution to gain self-control is "God-control." The believer has the presence and power of God within them to live a life not undermined by our inner desires and the corruption of the world. As believers, we are to draw on this power to live productive and effective lives.

FROM James 3-4:10 (CEV)

3 ...² All of us do many wrong things. But if you can control your tongue, you are mature and able to control your whole body.

³ By putting a bit into the mouth of a horse, we can turn the horse in different directions. ⁴ It takes strong winds to move a large sailing ship, but the captain uses only a small rudder to make it go in any direction. ⁵ Our tongues are small too, and yet they brag about big things.

It takes only a spark to start a forest fire! ⁶ The tongue is like a spark. It is an evil power that dirties the rest of the body and sets a person's entire life on fire with flames that come from hell itself. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed and have been tamed.

⁸ But our tongues get out of control. They are restless and evil, and always spreading deadly poison.

⁹⁻¹⁰ My dear friends, with our tongues we speak both praises and curses. We praise our Lord and Father, and we curse people who were created to be like God, and this isn't right. ...

¹³ Are any of you wise or sensible? Then show it by living right and by being humble and wise in everything you do. ...

^{4:1} Why do you fight and argue with each other? Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control your body? ² You want something you don't have, and you will do anything to get it. You will even kill! But you still cannot get what you want, and you won't get it by fighting and arguing. You should pray for it. ³ Yet even when you do pray, your prayers are not answered, because you pray just for selfish reasons.

⁴ You people aren't faithful to God! Don't you know that if you love the world, you are God's enemies? And if you decide to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. ...

⁷ Surrender to God! Resist the devil, and he will run from you. ⁸ Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Clean up your lives, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you people who can't make up your mind....

"The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks, yet we take this ability for granted. [In James] we see the importance of controlled speech and consequence of our words." --WARREN WIERSSER

Although it is our works and not our words that validate and verify our salvation, this does not mean words are not important in our spiritual life.

It has been said that inevitably we will sooner or later offend people with our spoken words, the more a person says, the greater his chances of offending someone. Agree? Disagree? Why?

Proverbs 18:21 says that the power of life or death is in the tongue. *(²¹ Words can bring death or life! Talk too much, and you will eat everything you say.)*

> Much of our tongue control is lost in gossip (prayer concerns, please remembers, I'm so saddened, I having trouble dealing withs, etc.) The best thing to do with gossip is stop it. Proverbs 26:30 (*²⁰ Where there is no fuel a fire goes out; where there is no gossip arguments come to an end.*)

James tells us that in our own power we are not able to control (tame) our tongue. Our speech is also to be given to God for his power of control.

> When our words are bitter, it is because our heart is bitter. (Matthew 12:34 -- ... *Your words show what is in your hearts.*)

Jon Courson says, **"The reason we put down other people, gossip about other people, fight with other people is because we want something from other people. ... Yet, the only way to get what our heart really craves is not to prey on others, but to pray to the Father."**

Your thoughts?

Even when asking for the wrong things, we can go to God who gives more grace to resist the temptation and/or recover from the situation. (Romans 5:20 ...*But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,*)

God graciously draws near to us when we deal with the sin in our lives that keeps him at a distance.

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. ... That's a promise! Don't let anyone cast aspersions on God's goodness or nature by saying, "I tried to get close to the Lord, but He is just so far from me." The Bible says He will draw nigh. ... God's Word says He will always draw near to us if we draw near to Him.

The Key: Make sure your desire to draw near to God is out of a genuine desire.

- > Draw near for the sole reason to get closer to God.
- > Draw near to hear from Him.
- > Don't draw near for the purpose of telling God what to do.
- > Don't draw near simply for an "easy fix."

Peter offered similar advice in his first letter to the Christians scattered throughout the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

1 Peter 5:8-11 New International Version (NIV)

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

When we yield to a temptation, we will face the same temptation time and again.

> Satan can't read your mind or see your heart. He is solely dependent upon trial and error to see what works.

< If he sees that something works to draw you away from God and keep you from doing what is right, he will continue to put that temptation in your path.

> If we resist the devil, he will flee. (vs 4:7)



The apostle Paul presented a different strategy to practice self-control in our lives — particularly in the area of sexual passions. Engage these natural desires within the boundaries of God's design.

FROM 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (NIV)

⁷ Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband....⁵ Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command....

⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

In all things, the spiritual must govern the physical.

> God knows our passions and desires, after all he created us. He also allows us to enjoy those passions and desires as long as they remain within the boundaries of Biblical morality and teaching.



Self-control is truly impossible. Our sin nature eventually wears us down and gets the best of us. Thankfully we, as believers, have the presence and power of God within to live a life not undermined by our inner desires and the corruption of the world. In Peter's second letter he challenged believers to draw on this power to live productive and effective lives. (See 2 Peter 1:3-11, pg. 385 BELIEVE)

Paul too stresses the importance of relying on the power of God, walking with the Holy Spirit, to remain in control. The ultimate solution to gain self-control is "God-control." (See Galatians 5:16-25, pg. 385-386 in BELIEVE).



KEY IDEA: I HAVE THE POWER THROUGH CHRIST TO CONTROL MYSELF.

PARAPHRASED FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee: Self-control as a fruit of the Spirit might be better understood as God-control. I control myself by giving control over to God. I surrender; the flesh gives up; God takes command. In fact, self-control is best achieved when harnessed to the practice of total surrender. Self-control is not about *trying hard* but about *yielding hard*. Self-control is yielding to God's power to do the things we should — and to not do the things we shouldn't.



How does the Spirit produce this fruit of self-control in us?

> By teaching us the power of Grace and enabling us to see and trust all that God is for us in Jesus. (Titus 2:11-12)

> When we really see and believe what God is for us by grace through Jesus Christ, the power of wrong desires is broken.

< Therefore the fight for self-control is a fight of faith. (1 Timothy 6:12)

Any command for obedience to God or behavior that is in keeping with Biblical Christianity/godliness is really a call for inward control by the grace and provision of God that is found for us in Christ.

> When insulted or mistreated the natural and sinful impulse is to react in retaliation. But God calls us to control those impulses by turning the situations over to Him. (See 1 Peter 1:21-25; 2:18; 3:8-12)

> The essence of self-control is the evidence of a character like Jesus'.

< Christians seek to exchange their lives, which were formerly dominated by the drives of the old life, with the new life in Christ. They become Spirit-filled.

DEVELOPING BIBLICAL SELF-CONTROL: from RICHARD WILKINSON

> *People with self-control master their moods. They do not let their moods master them. Most of what gets done in the world is accomplished by people who do the right thing even when they don't feel like it (Proverbs 25:28)*

> *People with self-control watch their words. They put their minds in gear before opening their mouths. (Proverbs 13:3)*

> *People with self-control restrain their reactions. How much can you take before you lose your cool? (Proverbs 19:11)*

> *People with self-control stick to their schedule. If you don't determine how you will spend your time, then others will decide for you. (Ephesians 5:15-16)*

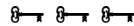
> *People with self-control manage their money. They learn to live on less than what they make and they invest the difference. The value of a budget is that it tells your money where you want it to go rather than wondering where it went! (Proverbs 21:20)*

> *People with self-control maintain their health. That way they can accomplish more and enjoy their achievements. (1 Thessalonians 4:4)*

But it takes more than just willpower for lasting self-control. It takes a power greater than yourself: "For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7, CEV)

In what areas do you need to develop self-control?

The disciplines you establish today will determine your success tomorrow.



HELP FROM THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Christian should not assume maintaining self-control to be a purely individual matter. It is vital to recognize that ministry within the body of Christ gives the responsibility to help others. Notice the emphasis in each of the following passages of Scripture that relate to helping the body of Christ:

- *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently”* (Galatians 6:1).
- *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”* (Galatians 6:10).
- *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it”* (1 Corinthians 12:26).
- *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work”* (Ephesians 4:15,16).
- *“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel”* (Philippians 4:2,3).

The gathering of early Christians in their homes offered opportunities for small groups of believers to encourage each other in their spiritual walk.

> Christians today also struggle to gain control of various aspects of their lives. Through ministering to one another the body of Christ builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16) as each person becomes more mature in character and behavior.



HOW DO WE DEMONSTRATE MORE SELF-CONTROL?

We’ve seen that the need to demonstrate self-control is critical. But how do we make the necessary changes and demonstrate more of it?

> Keep track, either in a journal or chart, of various reactions you experienced during the week and categorize them as either demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit with self-control or a work of the flesh with loss of control.

< Examine the causes and the thinking that led up to the reaction.

> When presented with a stressful situation, have a verse, phrase or prayer ready in your mind to help you focus on staying in control and looking to the fruit of the Spirit instead of a natural, knee-jerk reaction.

< For example, if someone tends to irritate you at work, think to yourself, “God wants me to rule over this”—before you lose control and insult them.

> Pray daily for God to give you more of His Spirit, including the self-control to demonstrate that fruit and avoid temptation.

< The more we pray, study and meditate to draw closer to God, the more we will have the control to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.

< Set goals to expand the quantity and quality of these tools in your life.

SELF-CONTROL SELF-EXAMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1) *Have I lost control to dangerous emotions or a damaging sin? How do I know?*

2) *Why do I have difficulties restraining myself from what I know isn't good for me?*

3) *Do others describe me as calm and collected or erratic and uncontrolled? Why?*

4) *Is my first reaction to something a fruit of the Spirit or a loss of control? Why?*

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

When it comes to self-control we need to remember the law of the harvest: we reap what we sow. (Galatians 6:7-9) There are always consequences to our behavior and we are foolish to think otherwise.

> But many times these consequences are so subtle, in relation to the consequences to sin, that it can be very deceiving for those who do not live in the light of the principles and promises of Scripture.

< This deceptive subtlety is in the fact that the consequences of sinful behavior are not immediately obvious.

<When we break spiritual laws, there are definite consequences that go into effect though the results are often not so immediately obvious.

> Scripture warns us of the consequences of lack of self-control. (1 Timothy 6:7-10 -- ⁷*We didn't bring anything into this world, and we won't take anything with us when we leave.* ⁸*So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes.* ⁹*People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them.* ¹⁰*The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.*)

Without self-control, we become slaves of all our enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil) and become incapacitated, unable to serve God and one another or even our own best interests.

>We end up not only serving ourselves, but we become slaves to our appetites. (2 Pet. 2:19 -- ¹⁹ *They promise freedom to everyone. But they are merely slaves of filthy living, because people are slaves of whatever controls them.*)

>If we are not training ourselves in the life of godliness and self-control, we will become trained and skilled in greed and covetousness, which is idolatry, the worship of the flesh and its appetites. (2 Peter 2:14; 1 Timothy 4:7)

WHY WE NEED SELF-CONTROL

As stated earlier, self-control is crucial to the functioning of the other aspects of the fruit of the spirit.

> It takes self-control to show true godly **love** instead of lust and infatuation—to love others not as the world loves, but as Christ loved us. (Ephesians 5:2).

> It takes self-control to have godly **joy** when we are facing a difficult situation in life. (1 Peter 1:8).

> It takes self-control to get along with others and make **peace** instead of constantly getting into conflict. (Matthew 5:9).

> It takes self-control to **patiently** bear with others rather than quickly condemning them. It's very hard to "be patient with all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

> It takes self-control to not automatically look out only for yourself but **kindly** look out for other people (Philippians 2:4).

> It takes self-control to do **good**, to go through the narrow gate toward life rather than the wide gate of destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

> It takes self-control to be **faithful** and not have our faith shattered by scoffers. (2 Peter 3:3-4).

> It takes self-control to be a **gentle** servant of the Lord (2 Timothy 2:24), showing compassion and mercy.



KEY APPLICATION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE IN THE WAY I LIVE?

FROM THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

Pull up any news feed on any day from anywhere in the world ... and you will read stories of people who lost their self-control. ... The common denominator in every crime ... is a person who gave in to the behavior in which he or she was tempted to engage. Granted, some decide they do not care at all about the consequences, but the vast majority will eventually regret they could not contain the emotion or feeling that fueled the fire that now consumes their lives. ...

AS WE DEVELOP THE VIRTUE OF SELF-CONTROL, OUR SIN WILL DECREASE AND OUR CHARACTER WILL INCREASE.

... As Christ takes over more and more territory in our heart, there is less of our flesh to interfere. As this transformation grows, sin's grip is loosened and God's qualities will show in ever-growing proportions.

AS WE DEVELOP THE VIRTUE OF SELF-CONTROL, OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WILL MATURE AT AN ACCELERATED RATE.

Self-control is not only about the discipline to stop doing things that destroy us but also about the discipline to do the things that build us up. ... As we develop the virtue of self-control, our relationships will flourish and strengthen at an accelerated rate.

Our connection to others is empowered when we increase our own self-control. Disagreements, arguments, angry outbursts, misspoken words, and misguided emotions can be held at bay by controlling the tongue, which is a stronghold for self-control. You will become a better spouse, parent, family member, employee, church member, and so on if you work on yourself first to squelch your own flesh.

... Yielding to the love, grace, and presence of Christ in us is the only way we can be victorious. ... Remaining in Christ today can allow us to overcome the world and the flesh. Self-control is possible when God is in control of us.