

November 25, 2007

“The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control” Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: Lack of yet longing for self control

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because self-control is the fruit of the Spirit,
(anchor) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate self-control in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

If virtues were part of a graduating class, “self-control” would surely not receive the “most popular” vote. We like the idea of love, joy, peace, etc. and would like to be thought of accordingly. But “self-control” is different. We know we need it. We’re just not sure that we want it. It’s the elective in the core curriculum, the odd cousin at the family reunion, the third wheel on the date. Fine to have along but hardly any fun.

At least that’s how it’s often regarded. But self-control is actually no less important, no less vital, than any other part of spiritual maturity and Christ-like character. And no less impossible for us to work up on our own. For it is the fruit of the Spirit.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Galatians 5:16-26](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Certainly, among all the figures in Old Testament history, Joseph stands out as one who exemplified what it means to be self-controlled. Irritated over his behavior and jealous of his status, his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Years later, as God providentially worked in circumstances and events, Joseph found himself appointed Pharaoh’s second-in-command and his brothers standing before him in need of help. They did not recognize him. But he did them. And after years of estrangement from his brothers and a series of creative tests for them, we read ([READ Genesis 43:29-31](#)).

But this is not the only example of such self-control. Years earlier in Joseph’s career, he had served as the attendant to one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard. The man’s name was Potiphar. In Genesis 39, we read ([READ Genesis 39:2-10](#)).

What Joseph was spurning was part of what Paul refers to in Galatians 5, the “desires” or “works of the flesh,” which had worked their way into the life of the church. Through this series we’ve emphasized the core of Paul’s message. Justification, our forgiveness and standing with God, can be secured only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That gospel, in the time since Paul had delivered it to them, had been corrupted by false teachers bringing a grace, faith, Christ “plus” message. And with it, not only had their standing with God been called into question but so also had their service to Him. For with self-righteousness comes self-dependence, a relying upon our own empty resources. And so there was no love, joy, peace, etc. Or self-control.

Wise King Solomon would have assessed this way ([READ Proverbs 25:28](#)). Now understand that broken walls symbolize defeat. In the ancient world, a city without walls was a city without defenses, prey to its enemies and cause for weeping from its people. This is a description of the church at Galatia. It’s a sobering image. And, to the extent we are relying on our own righteousness, our own resources, it’s an image of us as well. For we cannot work this up on our own. Self-control is but the fruit of the Spirit. And so it is to the Spirit we must look if we are to have our walls strong and our city secure.

I. IN OUR THOUGHTS

For instance, consider what is involved in self-control over our thoughts.

A) The Basic Principle

Paul expresses the basic principle this way ([READ 2 Corinthians 10:5](#)).

1. Immediate context

Now admittedly, the immediate context is referring to Paul's opponents in Corinth.

2. Broader idea

But the broader idea to which he is appealing is clear. Self-control of our thoughts means entertaining in our minds only those thoughts that are acceptable to God.

B) *The Believer's Preoccupation*

One could even call it "the believer's preoccupation" (READ [Philippians 4:8](#)).

1. Refusing certain things

Self-control of our thoughts begins with refusing to allow certain things into our minds – lust, greed, envy, selfish ambition. Throwing them aside, leaving them behind.

2. Focusing upon other things

But more than just refusing such things, it also means focusing on other things such as Paul mentions in [Philippians 4](#) – things good and pleasing to God. .

It is the principle of extrusion – one thing being pushed out and aside to make room for another. One thing being given such attention that the other withers and dies.

Illustration:

Extrusion. Something like what will be taking place in your mailbox over the coming weeks. Because of the sheer number of catalogs coming in, there will be little to no room for anything else. Much to the soreness of the arms of your mail carrier.

Application:

In terms of self-control of our thoughts, it begins but doesn't end with refusing the negative. It carries on with the focus on the positive. Now, here's the question. With all that in mind, if someone had recorded the meditations of your heart this week and played it through the speakers this morning, what would we hear? As you battled the traffic as you were running late to work. As the guests arrived on Thursday. As you jockeyed for position in the shopping line on "Black Friday." As your football team tugged on your heart strings on Saturday. As you poked and prodded your children to get them here on Sunday. Looking back on that which your thoughts were focused upon, ask yourself, "*Where did I lose control? What patterns do I see? Where do I need the Spirit's help?*"

II. IN OUR WORDS

Self-control and our need of the Spirit, begins with our thoughts. And from there, we can see how it flows over into our words. Paul writes (READ [Ephesians 4:29-30](#)).

A) *A Catalogue Worth Avoiding*

I've mentioned catalogues already. Not all of them are worth our time. Paul sets before us here a catalogue certainly worth avoiding. What do we see? At least this.

1. Reckless words

Reckless words – spoken hastily and without thinking.

2. Grumbling and complaining

Grumbling and complaining – critical and ungrateful, irritating and discouraging others.

3. Falsehood

Falsehood – any deceit or misrepresentation of the truth.

4. Gossip

Gossip – discussing things with others who are not part of the problem or the solution.

5. Slander

Slander – speaking false and malicious things about another person.

6. Worthless talk

Worthless talk – empty, ugly, irreverent babble meant to serve no one but ourselves.

All these can be gleaned explicitly or implicitly from Paul's words in Ephesians 4. And all of these are spoken against repeatedly making this a catalogue worth avoiding.

B) *Wise Counsel Worth Hearing*

Which makes the wise counsel from James all the more worth hearing. James' great concern throughout his letter is an emphasis on the works that spring forth from faith, true religion. And in chapter 3, he shows that true religion controls the tongue.

1. Strong warnings and stirring analogies (vv.1-5)

He begins with a strong warning and some stirring analogies (READ James 3:1-5).

2. Untamed and inconsistent (vv.6-12)

He moves to the nature of the tongue – untamed and inconsistent (READ James 3:6-12).

Application:

Now, hearing that, we need to ask ourselves, “*What sorts of words have passed through my mouth this past week? Where has my breath had more the scent of pungent sulfur than the fresh draft of grace?*” Before the Lord, letting Him search your heart, where have you lost control in your words? Where do you see your need of the Spirit?

III. IN OUR DEEDS

Oh, how we do need His work in and through us that we might be self-controlled in our thoughts, our words, and, finally, in our deeds! Self-control here is probably the area we think of the most and certainly it is the broadest and most inclusive.

A) *Accepting God's Gifts*

Recognizing that it begins with accepting God's gifts.

1. Not bad in and of themselves

Food, rest, sex – none of these things are bad in and of themselves.

2. But corrupted by the Fall

In fact, they are each good and beautiful. But each corrupted by the Fall.

B) *Avoiding Sin's Excesses*

Which means we must not only accept them as God's gifts but strive to avoid sin's excesses. Self-control here means not allowing anything to master or control us.

1. Gluttony

Think of food and drink and our tendency towards gluttony (READ Ephesians 5:17-18). The issue here is of control. As we stand in the buffet line or sit at the banqueting table, we have to ask, “*Who or what is controlling us? Food, drink, or the Spirit?*”

2. Laziness

But other good things can control us as well. We need sleep. We need to relax. But the desire for rest can degenerate into the sin of laziness (READ 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 10).

3. Sexual immorality

So, there is the struggle for control pertaining to our desires for food, for rest, and finally for intimacy. And here, there are no shortage of passages to which we could turn (READ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6; Hebrews 13:4). Clearly, God's standard is that of absolute abstinence outside of marriage. The matter is so serious, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (READ Matthew 5:27-30). As an example, we read of Job (READ Job 31:1).

All of which is to show how interrelated this is – not isolated to one area but actions beginning with thoughts, thoughts needing to be disciplined for the sake of action.

Illustration:

If you grew up in the church, you sang one of the wisest bits of counsel one could give at this point. Some, no doubt, could sing it right now ([READ lyrics](#)):

*Oh, be careful little eyes what you see,
Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.
For the Father up above is looking down in love
So be careful little eyes what you see.*

And then it moves on to ears and what they hear, hands and what they do, feet and where they go. Because what we see, hear, do, and go has such impact, we need to be careful.

Application:

And so, I have to ask myself and all of you this question. “*As you begin to think and wrestle through this, where do you see a loss of control? Where do you see your need of the Spirit?*” Where do you see the need towards restraining your impulses, desires, appetites? Not that God is calling us to live as ascetics, denying all our desires, but recognizing we are to satisfy them at the appropriate time in the appropriate way.

Oh, be careful little eyes and beware of the snares and lies of pornography. Oh, be careful little ears and do not allow others to breathe rumors, gossip, or slander in your presence. Oh, be careful little feet and do not go where you are too weak to venture.

Again, it’s the extrusion principle – replacing one thing with another. Self-control entails making time for exercise and giving your body needed rest. Being wise in the usage of your time – fighting the distractions that rob you of precious hours from family, friends, work, or study. Being careful with the television and the internet – both what we see and how much. Being wary of the temptation in accumulating more things. Some of us shop and spend too much – whether in the luxuries or in the garage sales. Some of us feel we have to have the latest tool, toy, gadget, or gizmo. And it all gets amplified with the excesses of the holiday season. Oh, be careful. Be careful.

And look to the Spirit that He might bear His fruit in your life. For the promise held out to those who rely upon Him and not themselves is real ([READ Galatians 5:16](#)).

CONCLUSION:

This isn’t something to be taken lightly. There’s a lot at stake – our well being, joy, God’s honor. Let me close with this. A little self-control can reflect a great deal more. A little self-control can reflect a great deal more. For example, Alexander Curchin, Sarah’s grandfather, and how he screened prospective employees. During the interviews, while everyone was at dinner, if the candidate put salt on his food without bothering to taste what was served, that candidate might very well not be hired. Why? Because of what Mr. Curchin regarded as the careless assumptions the candidate was making. He understood that a little self-control often reflects a great deal more.

That said, there’s yet another side to this. Little self-control can also lead to a great deal more. Understand that, no matter what area of your life you’re considering, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant you may think such self-control would be, it may not necessarily be the small thing you think it is. It could well be the first level compromised, the first battle lost leading to far worse defeats. A little self-control can reflect a great deal more. But little self-control can lead to a great deal more as well.

Given the implications of all of this, given how much is at stake and how little strength we have, it’s clear we need the Spirit. That we might be self-controlled in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds, we need the Spirit. To look to Him, to rely and to depend earnestly upon Him. Let’s go to Him now in prayer.

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