

PP Root to Fruit! *Going Deep, Growing Up*

Part 11-Galatians 5:23, *Self-control*

3/17-18/2018

What we are about to learn as we approach the virtue of self-control, which is a big deal

PP *“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”*

Proverbs 25:28

A city with broken-down walls, according to Nehemiah was in *‘great trouble and shame’*

A Christian lacking self-control is defenseless against the attacks of temptation

Therefore, we are to learn the meaning of self-control; the meaningless efforts for self-control; then and finally, most helpfully, the means of self-control

PP 1-The meaning of self-control

Peter the Great, was one of the mightiest of the Czars of Russia, in an angry fit once struck his gardener, and a few days afterwards the gardener died

“Alas,” he said, “I have conquered other nations, but I have not been able to conquer myself!”

Every Christian must learn how the self can be conquered and passions reigned in

It’s been said that people can control almost everything but themselves

But what is the actual meaning of self-control?

PP *‘self-control’* (Greek-*enkrateia*) comes from two concepts: *‘out of’* and *‘strength’*

It is literally one in control of strength having power to ‘hold oneself in’ or ‘master self’

It is to have power and dominion over your impulses, emotions, appetites and desires

Self-control is the Spirit-enabled power to stay within God-given boundaries

It is the Spirit’s power to rule over the desires of our flesh

Think on this statement for a moment: *All sin is an inside job*

While temptations act from outside of us, sinful desires originate from inside us

PP *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”* **James 1:14-15**

Temptation is the baited hook that attracts the fish of desire, that will reel us into sin

Solomon captured the inside world of insatiable desire, proving the need for self-control

PP *“And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure”* **Ecclesiastes 2:10**

Who is it that you have the most trouble with in your entire Christian life?

Isn’t the answer, when you truly and humbly reflect on it, yourself?

Consider how easily we are self-deceived, or get caught up in self-centeredness, or mired in self-pity or have a sense of self-importance, or love our selfies

Our world caters to, and encourages a self-oriented life

Solomon came to see the need for self-control: **PP** *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”* **Proverbs 4:23**

The ability to guard the heart is the self-control the Spirit is producing in us, enabling us to make right choices

And that ability to control the heart has been universally sought throughout the ages

PP 2-The meaningless efforts for self-control

Do you struggle with your thoughts; speech; stomach; eyes; credit cards; temper, or attitude? The unrestraint of desires was plaguing the churches of Galatia, so Paul wrote, ***“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”*** Galatians 5:13

Some of the Christians were saying, *We’re set free, we can live any way we want*

PP But as Alistair Begg said, *‘True freedom is not a license to do what we please, but the liberty to do what we ought’*

We have been set free from the power and penalty of sin by Christ, made free to live the life God wants for us...to love Him and display that love to the world

PP Again, Begg says of self-control, **PP** *‘We are held in bounds but we are not held in bonds’*

Self-control is Spirit given and must be responded to with grace-driven obedience

PP ***“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”*** James 1:25

There is a Spirit-enable ***‘doing’*** we must be about if we are to progress in spiritual maturity

PP *“Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts.”* John Owen, The Mortification of Sin

But the world and many Christians try to do without the power of God, and this is nothing new
The ancient Greeks prized self-control above all virtues

PP *“I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self.”* Aristotle

The Spock-like school of Greek philosophy called the Stoics elevated self-control the most
They taught that you can learn to

You see, the Stoics taught that if you could master self and endure hardship and pain without feelings or complaint, you could be perfectly free

A legend says that one Stoic wanted to prove his self-mastery, so he put a fox under his tunic
As the fox began to bite him, he didn’t move or even grimace

No one knew that anything was wrong, that he had a fox under his tunic until he fell over dead,
because the fox had torn into his stomach and eaten his insides

The problem has always been, a person cannot truly master desires, they are controlled by them
The response of many is to try even more desperately, more radically to control them
Many come to the solution then that they must end all desires, kill them and destroy them
Some, struggling with sexual urges have their organs removed, hands cut off, eyes gouged out
Some, struggling with their speech, have their tongues cut out
The first 2 leaders of the Stoics-Zeno and Cleanthes-committed suicide to destroy desire

By the 2nd Century, a group of Christians called the Encratites, forbade the eating of meat,
forbade getting married, forbade drinking wine, all trying to gain mastery over desires
They despised the Apostle Paul’s teachings and rejected the book of Acts
Before the Encratites was the Jewish sect called the Essenes, who lived together in the desert
forbidding wine, and committing to celibacy

In the 1970’s, Transcendental Meditation promised world peace as people learned its practices

In Buddhism, Nirvana is the place of perfect peace and happiness where your individual desires cease...and meditation is their means to get there

One of the latest meditation techniques is called **PP** mindfulness, defined as the *basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us*

Just recently a report was published looking at 20 studies on the effects of meditation techniques¹
The result...meditation didn't reduce aggression, or prejudice, or improve social-connectedness
Trying to gain mastery over ourselves in our own power produces wax fruit: it looks great as a decoration but worthless to one who is starving

Walking by the Spirit is to put no confidence in your ability alone to produce any of these virtues
It comes about in us as we surrender to Him, and in the Spirit's power, going to war!

PP 3-The means of self-control

You may be at the point in life where you wonder if you'll ever be able to develop self-control

Turn with me to the book of Titus and we'll see how to develop self-control in our lives

Titus was a young pastor in Crete, an immoral place filled with saloons and known as the first century party town...a favorite spring break destination

Paul quoted a Cretan prophet, *'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'* **Titus 1:12**

It was a place full of temptations that were tripping up the new Christians in the Cretan churches

With Crete's drunken love feasts happening all around them, purity was maddeningly difficult

So Paul insists that their Elders must be *'self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined'* **1:8**

Their older men, **2:2**, *'are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled'*

Older women likewise, reverent in behavior, not addicted to alcohol, living self-controlled **2:3**

They *'train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled'* **2:4-5**

Younger men were to be taught *'to be self-controlled'* **2:6**

Both genders of every age...must be self-controlled as they are surrounded by temptation

But how, for it's not enough to try and be self-controlled in our own efforts and strength

PP *Self-control is a work of grace

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions" **Titus 2:11-12a**

Grace is God's love and favor poured on sinners, to remove their sin and created relationship

Just as we cannot save ourselves, neither can we *'live self-controlled'* in our own power

Paul clearly tells us that this grace has a name, *"our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works."* **Titus 2:13-14**

PP *Self-control is a work of grace-trained obedience

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5354519/Meditation-DOESNT-make-better-person.html>

Grace not only changes us from a sinner to a saint, it gives us a new heart with new affections, and desires, and attitudes

We cannot develop self-control in our strength, neither will we develop it if we do not fight for it
Jesus not only saves us, He is training us to fight against the desires of our flesh

He won't fight the battles for us, He'll fight them with us

PP *"He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze"* Psalm 18:34

Will power is not the issue in self-control, grace-trained obedience is

Are you walking with the Spirit of God, so He can train you for war against your flesh, the temptations of the world, the strategies of the enemy?

If you try and defeat them in the strength of your will power, you will usually lose

Grace-warfare is done in the strength of Christ, obeying the Captain of our souls

PP *"Lord, wake me up in the morning with an eagerness to meet you in Word,"* Ravi Zacharias

But when you wake up, and open the scriptures, renounce the temptation to check Fb, or the news, or the weather, or do the dishes, because your morning is gone before you know it

Paul said **PP** "I discipline my body and keep it under control" 1 Corinthians 9:27

We fight the war, **PP** *"struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."*

Colossians 1:29

This is no *Let go and Let God*, this is get into the battle with the power of **PP** *"the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle"* Psalm 144:1

PP **Grace teaches us to say no to wrong, and yes to right*

"training us...to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works." 2:12-14

The slogan of '*self-control*' is not *Just Say No*, it is the power to say no to wrong and yes to right
C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, is a collection of 31 letters from a senior demon,

Screwtape, to his nephew Wormwood, on how to guide a man named 'Patient' to hell
One of the most insightful parts of the book is what I'll read to you, as Screwtape writes:

PP *"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's [God's] ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden."*

Friends, self-control is the means to enjoy the pleasures of God in the right way, at the right time, and in the right degree

Self-control is a grace of God, a virtue of Christ, enabling us to war against the desires of the flesh, and receive and enjoy the desires of God

PP *"Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart."* Ps. 37:4

Solomon wrote that God gives His people the '*power to enjoy*' His gifts (Ecclesiastes 5:19)

Self-control's the power to live for God's pleasure which becomes our pleasure, zealous for good
Sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action; reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny

And this is the great beauty of this Spirit-produced, grace-fought virtue...it is a heart being mastered by Jesus Christ, so His desires become our desires

It is the Spirit-given power to bring everything under the mastery of Jesus Christ, to live a life of love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness

‘Against such things there is no law’, for even unbelievers have no laws against these virtues

Certainly, God has no law against them, He wants all of us to have them in increasing measure

But no law can create them, only the Spirit of God as He produces them from within His people

Amen?

Pray