

Galatians 5: 23; “The Believer’s Self-Control”, Message # 50 in the series – “Christ has Set us Free”, a Bible Study conducted on March 2nd, 2016, by Pastor Paul Rendall at his home.

We have now come to the last of the fruit of the Spirit; that of self-control. The word in the Greek is *εγκρατεια*, and it is translated in the King James as “temperance”, but R.C. H. Lenski says that the word “temperance” is inadequate to convey all of what this word is meant to convey. I think that he means that temperance only conveys the idea of voluntarily self-restraint; keeping yourself from excessive eating of food and drinking too many alcoholic beverages, when the word actually means “holding all of your desires and passions in check”. It is not only outward self-restraint. The outward self-restraint, if it is Biblical and godly comes from inward self-restraint of the thoughts of your heart. Webster’s 1828 Dictionary says that temperance is – “Moderation; particularly, habitual moderation in regard to the indulgence of the natural appetites and passions; restrained or moderate indulgence; as temperance in eating and drinking ; temperance in the indulgence of joy or mirth. Temperance in eating and drinking is opposed to gluttony and drunkenness, and in other indulgences, to excess. But secondly, this Dictionary says that temperance is also exercising and exhibiting “Patience: calmness; sedateness ; moderation of passion.” These two definitions, together, rightly describe our word “self-control”. But to truly understand what is meant here, Biblically, let us proceed on tonight to look at self-control from the negative and the positive sides of it.

1st – The Negative side of self-control.

The negative side of self-control is learning to hold in check all of your desires and passions by the power of the Holy Spirit. Look back up the page to verses 16-21. “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” “The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and like...” I hope that you see here that obedience to God and His word will require of you, as a believer in Christ, to exercise self-control by the power of the Holy Spirit, to keep yourself from these sins that are listed here; sins which begin in the heart. You are not under law, you are under grace. You are not “in” the flesh, you are “in” the Spirit when you have believed in Jesus. The flesh is what remains in you of the person that you once were, with all of your sinful desires. But you should know that that person, with all of those sinful desires, has died with Christ. And so, you do not have to think in that old way or live that old way of sin any longer; denying and ignoring the truth of God’s word, and living in your own selfish and God-denying way any longer.

This is a marvelous reality in the life of every believer. But it should not be mistakenly thought, by any Christian, that the flesh was eradicated from your being when you believed. It was not removed entirely from your being, or you would have been a perfect person the moment you were born again. The ruling, dominating power of sin has indeed been broken, but there is the real battle of the Spirit against the flesh that is just beginning, and will continue all through your life. And so, when you become a believer, the battle to be righteous and to bring forth fruit unto God begins. Look at 1st Peter 2, verses 11 and 12. “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” You see, it takes self-control to abstain from fleshly lusts. The flesh will lust against the Spirit’s good motions in His directing

you to righteous thoughts and righteous actions. These fleshly thoughts and desires will attempt to turn your heart towards the idea that they should be both tolerated and promoted as they once were. This is called “waging war” here. They will war against your soul’s good desires and thoughts that come from the motions of the Spirit.

In unbelievers, there is no principle of righteousness, no seed of righteousness (1st John 3: 9) to keep these things from breaking out in their actions except their own determination not to do engage in them. They do not have the fruit of the Spirit which is self-control. In many unbelieving people this principle of self-control is entirely lacking. With them, all of life revolves around themselves and self-indulgence. They want to promote and indulge the desires of the flesh and the mind. (Ephesians 2: 3) They want God and other people around them to accept them as they are, with all of their sins against God and other people, which they are not at all intending to repent of. In this sense they are completely lacking in self-control, and they need to be warned of the consequences. Look over a 1st Corinthians 6: 9-11 – “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” “Do not be deceived.” “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortions will inherit the kingdom of God.” “And such were some of you.” “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” I hope that you can see here that if you have believed in Jesus Christ you repented of all of your sins; you turned away from them all, even as they are listed here. And, you were sanctified; that is, you were given a new heart with the ability to exercise self-control in relation to abstaining from fleshly lusts and harmful desires and bad attitudes.

2nd – The Positive side of self-control.

How far does self-control extend in living the Christian life? So far we have now seen that it is holding in check and confronting ourselves in our heart, in order to stop and put to death the desires and passions of the flesh, in relation to all that that we think and say and do. We keep ourselves from sin and wrong attitudes. The positive side of self-control relates to all the things that we say and do, as well. But its primary focus is the spirit with which we do them and what we are trying to achieve as we live our Christian life. To do good things for God and for Christ requires the grace of self-control to be in exercise. In the true Christian, since they have believed in Jesus Christ, the power of sin has been broken in them; they are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. They have a new spirit with new desires, and these good desires are cultivated in relation to how they can glorify God in everything that they do and say. Turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 10: 31. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” To do all to the glory of God in everything requires the grace of self-control. Your renewed self is exercising a holy control over all that you take in, in terms of food and drink, and in terms of whatever you do. I have tried to tell you in past messages on the fruit of the Spirit that being sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in relation to keeping the commandments of God is the true way to bring forth the fruits of righteousness and thus glorify God in the way that you live your Christian life.

Look at Proverbs 25: 11-13. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.” “Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters.” Let us ask ourselves whether we are able to speak in this way? To exercise self-control in a positive sense, unto godliness, you must come to understand what it means to rule your own spirit. Turn with me over to the book of Proverbs 25: 28. “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls.” This means that learning to rule over yourself, to cultivate a good spirit, to have an excellent spirit; this is the finest of works. It will require that you have the grace of self-control to do what it says here: be slow to anger.

Being often of an angry spirit when things do not go the way that you want them to, will bring discouragement to you. And you will find that you are continually hurting and offending people around you. If you do not cultivate in your spirit the grace of self-control, the enemies of your soul: doubt, unbelief, and fear will come, and gain entrance into your heart and your highest and greatest usefulness to God will not be appear. For your work for Christ to be established it will require that you pray to have self-control and think of what God is looking for from you in situations where you are tempted to be angry. Look at Proverbs 16: 32. “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” But we must go farther than this.

A right spirit in glorifying God and doing good will only come through having the self-control to add virtue to your faith. 2nd Peter 1, verses 5-8. “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” See, the way to grow up into being a Christian who is useful in the Master’s service, you must add to knowledge, self-control. You must see that when you speak that you study to edify others; to build them up and not be critical of them and tear them down. Brotherly kindness is your great object in exercising self-control. You may know much, but can you convey that knowledge to others with wisdom and with love?

Turn with me over to Philippians 1: 9-11. “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” You can see here that in order to make progress in bearing fruit unto God to the glory of God you must become a person of prayer. And to cultivate your prayer life, you will need the grace of self-control to learn to pray often and to learn to pray regularly. And further, in the process of cultivating your own prayer life, you will even come to see your need of the prayers of other Christians for you as well. And when you engage in prayer for yourself and others you will be asking yourself certain questions. Does my love abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment? And how can I be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ? It is by being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God? All of this is going to take self-control. You will need self-control to be able to love people around you with the love of Christ; to be able to restrain yourself from bad and hurtful and unloving comments upon people and the way that they act and the things that they say. You have knowledge, but is it real knowledge? You have discernment, but is it real discernment? But here in our text we find that self-control is the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, look with me over at 1st Corinthians 9: 24-27. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?” “Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” “And, everyone who competes for the prize is temperate (there is our word) in all things.” “Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.” “Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.” “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” The word “temperate” here is the verb form of the same word that we are studying tonight – self-controlled. The one who would win the prize from Christ, the person who would have a crown and a reward given him by Christ at the last day for the way that he or she lived, must cultivate a self-disciplined spirit and life. They much exercise much self-discipline and self-control. Our living our life to God’s glory, in this sense, is pictured for us as a race that we prepare for each day by exercising self-control. Everyone who would compete in this race and win the prize is temperate in all things. The King James translation says, “But I keep under my

body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” But we should not think that Paul was worried about being cast away forever from God’s presence, or cast into hell. Surely if this is a believer who is being talked about, this would go against a number of other passages of Scripture. We should rather understand this in the sense of disqualifying ourselves from being of use to Christ and receiving a crown, or a reward for our labors on the last day.

Charles Spurgeon says concerning 1st Corinthians 9: 27 – The Greek word, which is translated “a castaway” is “adokimos.” It might better have been rendered “disapproved.” It certainly has no such meaning as that which has been generally given to it. Paul was not afraid of being cast away by God at the last. What he aimed at was this, — as he had entered the lists, as a Christian minister, to fight for Christ, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to seek to win souls for Christ, he must keep his bodily powers and passions so in subjection that, at the last, when the prizes were distributed, he would be found to have won his. This is quite another matter from being “a castaway” from salvation and eternal life. Paul was saved and he knew it; and some of us know, to a certainty, that we are saved; but we also know that there is another crown to be won, which the Lord will give to his servants who win in the great fight with sin. To win this crown is our high ambition and we long to hear the Master say to each one of us, in that day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

In conclusion - If we exercise self-control we will not be disqualified, but rather our work will be established and our God glorified. Psalm 90: verse 17 – “And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands.”