

Self-control

Purpose: To understand what the fruit of self-control means and to inspire the students to allow the Holy Spirit to develop it in their daily lives.

Objective: By the end of this devotional the student will:

1. Know what self-control means.
2. Value self-control in their lives.
3. Trust the Holy Spirit to develop self-control in their daily lives.

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 9:25 "And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

I. Introduction

For eight sessions we have looked at different facets of the fruit of the Spirit (*If this is taught as the 9th in a series of 9 on the "Fruit of the Spirit" – Galatians 5:22,23*). In this session, we are going to look at the last one — self-control. Turn with me once again to Galatians 5:19-23. We have two alternative life-styles here. Notice the difference in the way the two lists are described. The "deeds" of the flesh vs. the "fruit" of the Spirit. The contrast is not simply one of result, i.e., what they do, but one of source. One is a work, the other is a fruit. One is an effort, the other is an overflow. The first three aspects of the fruit of the Spirit flow from God. We are filled with His love, His joy and His peace. The focus of the fruit is our relationship with God, not on what we do. Because of the abiding in God and our daily experience of His love, joy and peace, we overflow toward others in patience, kindness and goodness. This abiding in Him causes us to become increasingly more like Him, we become faithful, gentle and self-controlled. Paul writes to Timothy, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13.) Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). God is faithful and gentle and as we abide in Him, we, too, become more and more faithful and gentle. The final character quality of God that the Spirit produces in us is self-control.

II. Meaning of the word

A. Biblical Understanding

- Self-control means the power or lordship one has over oneself or over something. It is mastery over one's desires and impulses. God has exercised self-control from the beginning. Read Psalm 103:8, 10, 13 & 14. The Greek and Roman gods lacked this quality. They were vindictive, angry, drunk, sensual and capricious. They fulfilled their every whim. Our God exercises self-control every time we sin. He holds back justice. He does not let anger over sin control Him.
- Self-control is most commonly referred to in sexual matters. It is used in contrast to the sensual sins of fornication, impurity, and indecency, drinking bouts, and orgies involving uncontrolled sensual passion. Chastity can be used for this word. Paul

advises the believers of Corinth that if they cannot control themselves, they should “. . . marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”
I Corinthians 7:9

- It is also used to describe an athlete’s control over his body and desires during training according to I Corinthians 9:24–27. It is mastery of oneself and the fashioning of one’s life in a way that God desires.

B. Extra-biblical Understanding

- Socrates regarded self-control as a cardinal virtue allowing the individual to *maintain freedom* in self-restraint. “The ideal of the free and independent man, of the man who is under no control but who freely controls all things and who in self-restraint maintains his freedom.”
- British statesman Edmund Burke argued, "men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the *less of it there is within, the more there is without*. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds *cannot be free*. Their passions forge their fetters." (Imprimis, Vol 20, #9)
- During his term as President of the U.S., Lyndon Johnson was somewhat overweight. One day his wife challenged him with this blunt assertion: "*You can't run the country if you can't run yourself.*" Respecting Mrs. Johnson's wise observation, the President lost 23 pounds. (Unknown)

Transition: Robert E. Lee was once asked what he considered to be the greatest virtue. His response: self-control. Our culture views self-control, not as a virtue, but as a vice. In reality without self-control there can be no freedom! Self-control is a virtue to be added to our faith along with other virtues according to II Peter 1:5-6.

III. Conclusion

In John 15:8 Jesus said, “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” The fruit of our lives is the clearest indicator of whose disciple we are. Notice that the fruit of the Spirit is not understood in term of success in ministry. It certainly will result in it, but it does not pertain to it. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and, now, self-control. Each one pertains to our walk with God and its overflow in our lives toward others. As the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives we bring glory to God. Self-control, the last facet of the fruit of the Spirit, is probably the most tangible of nine. As such, it could almost act as a litmus test for all the others because we need it to be patient, kind and good in the face of injustice and adversity and faithful and gentle in the temptation to be self-absorbed.

IV. Application:

Are you giving glory to God through exercising self-control? Are you exhibiting self-control in

sexual matters? Do your desires and appetites for power, prestige and pleasure control you more than they should? What about your tongue? Is it a blessing to others, or does it spout about like an uncontrolled hose? Our religious professions are worth little without control of this small but powerful part of the body. Finally, is the self-control you exercise a deed or a fruit? Are you grunting it out for God, or is it an overflow of your relationship with God?

Ask God right now to reveal to you where you are not exercising self-control. Then, ask Him to fill you with his Spirit and to glorify Himself in you by manifesting the fruit of self-control.

Take a few minutes and pray and ask God where you are lacking in self-control. Write those areas down on a sheet of paper and talk to your mentor about these areas of need. Make a plan to improve in those areas by the Spirit who lives in you.