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The Need For Self-Control

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Introduction

1. Today, we come to the last of the traits which make up that which Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22).
2. It is “self-control.” How many of us wouldn’t like to have a little more self-control or self-discipline in our lives?
 - a. What about those of you who are parents of small children?
 - b. Perhaps those of you who manage several employees day in and day out.
 - c. Maybe you who are teachers with a classroom full of students.
 - d. How about those among our youth who have a number of peer pressures facing them every day?

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3. Much has been said about the importance of this virtue down through the ages:
 - a. In Proverbs 16:32, the wise man Solomon wrote, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” (Proverbs 16:32)
 - b. An old Chinese text states “He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered himself is mightier still” (Tao Te Ching, 6th cent. B.C.).

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- c. The English poet, John Milton wrote, “He who reigns within himself, and rules passions, desires, and fears, is more than a king.”
- d. Leo Tolstoy, a Russian author from the 19th century said, “There never has

been, and cannot be, a good life without self-control.”

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- e. John Wooden, the head coach of UCLA Bruins, said, “If you lose self-control everything will fall.”
3. Though “self-control” is the last virtue which Paul lists, it could be considered the most important of the nine virtues which make up “the fruit of the Spirit.”
 - a. Without “self-control” we cannot overcome the “works of the flesh.”
 - b. Also, without “self-control” the other traits which make up “the fruit of the Spirit” will not be evident in our lives.
 4. What is self-control?
 - a. Literally, it comes from a compound Greek word which means “power over me.”
 - b. It is the ability to master our desires and our passions.
 5. Since Paul encourages you and I here in Galatians 5 to . . .
 - a. “walk by the Spirit (vv. 16, 25),
 - b. be “led by the Spirit” (v. 18)
 - c. and “live by the Spirit” (v. 25),. . . let’s look at this important virtue of the Spirit’s fruit to learn more about it and how we may develop it in our lives.

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I. The Nature of Self-Control

A. IT’S A NECESSARY PART IN OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS

1. The Greek noun *enkrateia*, which is translated “self-control,” is found in only three passages in the New Testament.
2. Even so, it is still vital to our growth as Christians.

3. The first time we encounter it is in Acts 24:25, where the apostle Paul is speaking to the Roman governor Felix and his wife Drusilla about faith in Christ.

“But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you” (Acts 24:25).

- a. Felix realized that the injustices in his regime stood in stark contrast to the righteousness of God.
- b. He was also a man who seriously lacked self-control in his life (i.e., his marriage to Drusilla was his third and he had to break up another marriage to get her).

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3. The second time we encounter self-control in the N.T. is in Galatians 5:23, where it marks one who is being led by the Spirit.
4. The last time is in 2 Peter 1:6 where the apostle Peter teaches us to “add to [our] knowledge, self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness” (NKJV).
 - a. It is one of seven virtues which form the building blocks of our lives as Christians.
 - b. These virtues keep us from being “useless” and “unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 8).

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B. THE SACRIFICE IT REQUIRES

1. In our reading today, from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul compared his own commitment to the gospel to that of one of the runners in the Isthmian games.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.” (v. 24).

2. All of the athletes who run in the race want to win, but the one who wins outperforms the rest of the field.

“Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things” (v. 25a).

3. The winning athlete is set apart from the other athletes by his self-control.
4. He disciplines every area of his life in order to win the race:
 - a. He will not stay up late because his needs rest.
 - b. He will carefully watch his diet.
 - c. He trains constantly, always looking for ways to improve.

☐ All of this is so that he might win “a perishable wreath” made of either pine needles or wilted celery.

5. Paul’s point is that as Christians we should exercise “self-control” in our lives in order to “win the race” which is set before us.

“Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

☐ Our effort is made all the more significant by the fact that we are striving for “an imperishable” wreath, a crown of righteousness.

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C. ITS DIFFICULTY TO MAINTAIN

1. In Proverbs 16:32, Solomon said, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”
2. In Proverbs 25:28, he compared a person who has no self-control to a city without walls.

“Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.”

3. James spoke of how difficult it is to manage such a small thing as our

tongue:

- a. “If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless” (James 1:26).
- b. In James 3:7-8, he tells us that it is easier to tame a wild animal than our tongues:

“But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”

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III. What Are We To Do?

A. RECOGNIZE THAT CHRIST IS OUR STRENGTH FOR SELF-CONTROL

1. In Romans 7:14-24, Paul describes his struggle.
2. His problem and ours, as well, is that the Law which God gave at Mt. Sinai to the Israelites is “spiritual”.
3. It was given by One who is holy, perfect, and is Himself Spirit, while Paul said he was “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (v. 14).
3. He said, “I do not understand my own actions . . . I do not do what I want.” Instead, “I do the very thing I hate” (v. 15).
4. He’s like the little boy whose honest answer when he is asked why he did something wrong is, “I don’t know.”
5. In verse 18, Paul said, “I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (vv. 18b, 19).
6. In verse 20, he identifies the reason for his lack of self-control, “if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”
7. In verses 21-23, Paul explains how he keeps failing in his own effort to

control himself and do what is right:

- a. “When I want to do right, evil lies close at hand” (v. 21, ESV).
 - b. Even though he delights in the law of God in his inner being (v. 22), there is a war being waged against his new nature, “the law of [his] mind,” trying to make him “captive to the law of sin” which still dwells in him.
 - c. Even though you and I seek to honor Christ through our attitude and our actions, we still find that we cannot in our own power resist the “law of sin” that dwells in us.
8. Like Paul we keep asking “Who will deliver me from this body of death” (v. 24, ESV).
 9. The answer is that God is the One who sets us free, and He does it “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25).

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10. The secret to developing self-control in our lives is Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1-2)

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

Conclusion

1. What the Holy Spirit is telling us through the apostle Paul is that you and I may try as much as possible to develop mastery over our sinful lives.
2. However, without Christ, we will always fail.
3. Only He can set us free and give us the strength, day by day, to master more of our lives.

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4. God strengthens us “with power through His Spirit in [our] inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).
5. Thus, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).
6. Have you come to Christ in obedient faith and allowed Him to wash away your sin through His blood in baptism?
 - a. If so, then the Holy Spirit is in your life to help you master your desires, your words and your actions so that they please God.
 - b. If not, you are fighting a battle every day which you cannot win, no matter how hard you try.
7. Will you come to Jesus and let Him save you today?