

February 19, 2017

Self-Control – The Invisible Virtue

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Proverbs 25:28¹

28 Like a city whose walls are broken through
is a person who lacks self-control.

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all scripture is from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

Introduction

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Self-Control – The Invisible Virtue

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- Thank you, Bruce.
- If you have been here the last few weeks, you may remember that we are in the midst of a Sermon series on the Fruit of the Spirit.
- The fruit of the Spirit are listed in a number of places in the New Testament such as in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. He writes Gal 5:22-23

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²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 5:22-23

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- Does self-control belong in that list?
- We can usually tell if someone is being loving, or joyful but self-control? Usually you can't tell if someone is exercising self-control. That is why I've called it the "invisible virtue." If you truly have self-control, no-one can see it.
- Notice that I said we usually cannot tell or that if someone is exercising self-control well. if someone is exercising self-control. To start off our discussion of self-control, let us look at this short video that shows us one way self-control looks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz1pnFBLZM4&spfreload=10>

- Children show their emotions. It is obvious what they are thinking.

What is it?

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What is self-control?

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- What is self-control?
 - The kids in the video were given a choice—one marshmallow now or two in a few minutes.
 - Is this the type of self-control that Paul was talking about? Delay your gratification now so that you can more in the future?
- For us
 - Is self-control only about delayed gratification?
 - If not, the why self-control?
 - Some would say that self-control is unneeded.
 - Is it just something that uptight people want – to be in control?
 - If we don't practice self-control,
 - is that bad?
 - If you practice those other virtues,
 - why do you need self-control?
 -
- There is no law that says you must have self-control.
- There is no commandment “thou shall be in self-control”
[pause]
- Control in itself doesn't matter,
 - rather it is what it prevents—hurting others, ourselves, dishonoring God –sin.
 - The lack of self-control isn't a sin,
 - but lack of self-control leads to sin doesn't it.
 - Self-control stops the small things from become big sins.
- Lack of self-control is like jumping off of a cliff.

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- It is not the jump that is bad, it is the sudden stop at the bottom that is bad. That sudden stop is the sin.

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Why is it important

- Self-control is mentioned 14 times in the NIV Bible.
- God tells us that it is important for us to practice.
- The first occurrence is what Bruce first read in Proverbs 25:28.

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**28 Like a city whose walls are broken through
is a person who lacks self-control.**

Proverbs 25:28

[[end slide]]

- Self-control is like a wall that protects you from the enemy. It protects the Christian from sin.
- Without self-control, the soul's shelter is lost.

[pause]

- Self-control protects ourselves.
- What else does it do?
- If you profess that you follow Jesus and then you don't exercise self-control – you are a hypocrite!
 - For us to be real, to be honest as Christians, we must have self-control.
 - We must live what we profess and preach.
- For example, James writes that we must have self-control our tongues. In James 1:26

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²⁶Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

James 1:26

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Verbally hurt

- We may say that your will power is your business. We may say that I'm the only one who gets hurt by my lack of self-control.
 - This is not the case.
 - If we can't control our anger, we can hurt others.
 - Sometimes our sin wounds or kills the spirit of others.
 - If we can't control our tongue and gossip about someone else,
 - we can kill their reputation.
 - It can drive them to hurt themselves as we have seen with cyber bullying.
 - If we can't control our tongue and wrongly—either out of ignorance or pride—put down others in the church,
 - we harm Christ's mission in the world.

Physically hurt

- Not only can we verbally hurt others but we can physically hurt others.
 - Consider the story of Cain and Abel
- In Gen 4:6-7, just after Cain's sacrifice was rejected by God, God asks to Cain:

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⁶ “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?⁷
If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?
 But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door;
 it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Genesis 4:6-7

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- Cain must have self-control.
 - God warned Cain. It is important to God that we have self-control
 - Cain didn't exercise self-control.
 - Abel paid the price
- Self-control is not only about us, it also helps those around us.
- God is God of justice,
- the self-control of following His will enables you to
 - not only be a socially responsible person
 - but a good Christian as well.

We need help

- The truth is that by our own efforts, we can't exercise self-control forever.
- Psychologists tell us that self-control is like a muscle.¹ Like a muscle it has limited energy.
 - In the short term, we can exercise self-control through our own will. Like our muscles, we get tired and when we no longer have the strength, we fail.
 - The walls protecting our soul fall down,
 - and sin sneaks in.
 - We can practice self-control which will make us ready for those "heat-of-the-moment" temptations
 - but we cannot continue to use our will-power for self-control forever.
- There is hope for us.
 - We have the Holy Spirit who can help us.
 - Only with spirit-power do we have hope of maintain our self-control both in the moment and in the long run.
- God knows that we need help.
- That is what Paul wrote to Titus in our passage today:

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"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It (grace) teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives."

Titus 2:11-13

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[pause]

Work with the Spirit

- How can we work with the Spirit to have self-control?
- I'll go over a couple of techniques right now but will discuss this more in the second hour class in room 15.
- First technique: Remove yourself from temptation.
- An example of this technique is Joseph, son of Jacob.
 - Joseph, as you may recall was a slave in Egypt.
 - He found himself working for Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh.
 - Despite Potiphar's wife's constant attempts to seduce him, Joseph refuses to go to bed with her.

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¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

Genesis 39:10

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- “or even be with her.”
- Unlike the kids in the video who stared at the marshmallow that they couldn't have,
 - Joseph removed himself physically as much as possible from temptation.
- It is like an alcoholic not going into a bar, or a smoker avoiding people smoking, or a shopaholic avoiding stores.
 - Remove yourself from proximity to what you don't want to do.
- Don't test yourself like those kids did by nibbling at the Marshmallow!
- Do parts of the internet tempt you?
- There is an app for that – self-control –
 - for the Mac there is the Self-control app (see <https://selfcontrolapp.com/>)
 - Block those sites that tempt you for gambling, porn, video gaming excessively

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- Use whatever tools you can to make sin harder.
 -
 - Second technique. Focus upon what you want and not what you can't have
 - As our text says, we must choose our focus to “**live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.**”
 - Paul writes to the Philippians 4:8

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Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, ... think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

[[end slide]]

- “(T)hink about these things.” Think holier, purer, righteous thoughts and don’t dwell on what you don’t want to do.
 - When I was learning how to drive, I remember the instructor telling us to not look at car parked on the street which you are driving past
 - because you tend to steer where you are looking.
 - Don’t get distracted by what you can’t have but focus on what you want.
 - Focus upon those other virtues “**love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness**” and you will have self-control.

Self-control self-check

- If you find yourself being the opposite of these virtues, that is maybe a sign to you that you have lost self-control.
 - For example,
 - When we listen to the news
 - do we lose our peace,
 - start talking hate and impatience, and
 - thinking of the punitive actions that we can take?
 - Do we demonize people who do not see the world our way?
 - [pause]
 - Do we think that we have the right to punish others or
 - to demonize God's children?
 - Isn't that God's place?
- If we do these things, we become who Timothy warned us against.
In 2 Tim 3:1-5 he writes:

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3 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, ...³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, ... Have nothing to do with such people.

2 Tim 3:1-5

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- Is this who we want to be?
[pause]
- If we act this way, then we can no longer call ourselves Christians.

- Instead of losing control, you may have to:
 1. Avoid listening to politics or
 2. Change your focus to the positive things that are being done like the people fighting evil.
- These are just a few things that you can do.
- Above all, trust God and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit for the positive things you can do, for the witness you can be.
 - Strengthen your spiritual walls,
 - strengthen your soul's protection,
 - don't tear them down from the inside.
- Act like a follower of Jesus.

My problem with self-control

- We are not perfect. At time we may lose self-control. There are some parts of us that we may never be in 100% control over.
- My problem is anger. I lose my temper.
- I must exercise self-control over my temper
 - I've worked hard to deal with it in the past.
 - But it still flares up!
 - It springs up when I least expect it.
 - When it does, I have to exercise self-control.
 - Through the Spirit's direction and grace, I've partially mastered it.
 - I now direct my anger at the action that upset me and
 - not the individual.
- Proverbs 29:11 was written for me:

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¹¹ Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end.

Proverbs 29:11

[[end slide]]

- I wish I was always wise and in self-control

Loss of control

- What do you do when you lose self-control?
- Do you hit the ground hard?

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- What do you do after you hit the ground?
 - Do you then get up? Begin again.
 - Do you feel it is no use? You just can't do it?
 - Remember, we are not perfect. We have all fallen.
 - If you are sorry/repent, it is ok. You have God's forgiveness
 - It is no excuse to stay down because we think that we aren't worth it.
 - You are worth it.
 - Jesus' death on the cross for you says that you are.
- God wants us to become better than we are today.
- We can do it by spirit-power.
 - Focus upon what we want to have, the fruit of the Spirit: peace, justice, truth, etc.
 - This is a reality worth having...
- Although we are weak and temptation surrounds us,
 - if we ask, the Holy Spirit will help us overcome.

Conclusion

- We all have challenges for our self-control us today.
- In the Believe Class after the service we will have a chance to talk about other challenges to self-control and what other people have found helpful. Please feel free to join us in Rm 15.
- Although self-control may be the invisible virtue—it is hard to see someone practicing it—but it is a critical virtue for us to have. It protects our soul and keeps us from sin, from that painful last foot of our fall from grace.
- That is why self-control is on the list of the fruit of the Spirit.
- Self-control is a virtue that we cannot do alone but need the help of the Holy Spirit.
- I want to close with a second reading of today's passage. As Paul wrote in his letter to Titus 2:11-13

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For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.
It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and
to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,
while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:11-13

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Challenge

- Lastly, I want to challenge you today to respond to the word of God to practice self-control.
- The word of God is of no benefit unless we respond.
- I've found that make a written or verbal profession means more of a commitment than just a mental note.

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Challenge

- Write on a yellow card:
 - One area of self-control to work on
 - What action you will take

Take it with you as a reminder

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- Take your time. Use the offertory time to respond to what the Holy Spirit is leading you to do.

Prayer

- Join me in Prayer
 - Dear Jesus,
 - Thank you for the grace to say “No” to our self-interest and selfish desires.
 - Send us the Holy Spirit that we may focus upon the fruit of the spirit.
 - Sometimes we fail. We hit the ground.
 - Lift us up Lord when we fall.
 - Accept these yellow cards with our confession that we need help with self-control.
 - Nurture in us the desire to flee from the temptations of this world and
 - instead help us to build up the spiritual walls protecting our soul.
 - We are confident of Your help.
 - We ask this in Your holy name.
- Amen

Endnotes

1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-control>