

## **“The Power of Self-Control”**

### **Self-control is not always my best fruit of the Spirit**

Can we say that we are always self-controlled? Not me. I can remember working on my go cart in Jr. High. My temper was not so self-controlled back then. The chain was not staying on the sprocket so I swore and then slammed the socket wrench I was using down on the back tire in frustration. I never expected it to bounce back up and clock me in the forehead. It was like something out of a movie. It made my friend who was helping me laugh until he cried. It only made me feel stupid and angrier. And it left its mark for several days both outwardly and inwardly.

### **Self-Control reveals and reflects Jesus.**

Self-control is not only a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23) but it is also a character trait of Jesus Himself. Consider two verses. Isaiah 53:7 says, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” Consider also 1 Peter 2:22-24. “‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’<sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> ‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’.”

What a contrast this is to the hateful Chief Priests, the guards, and passers-by who, we are told, sneered at him, spit on him, beat him, mocked him, and taunted him to come down off the cross. Self-control clearly *reveals* our Savior. As a fruit of the Spirit this also means that self-control is *reflective* of our Savior, who suffered in the cruelest way and yet continued to remain in control of Himself and the situation. When His people put it into practice, they reflect who they represent.

### **A lack of self-control can be very unhealthy.**

On the other hand, Proverbs 25:28 tells us that “a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” A lack of self-control may steal something from us. We may say something we wish we could take back. We may buy something that seemed like a good idea at the time but really only left our wallets lighter. Worse we may bring harm to our children with a bad example. Our children are often reflections of their parents.

Thomas Costain’s history, *THE THREE EDWARDS*, described the life of Raynald III, a fourteenth century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, *Crassus*, which means ‘fat.’

After a violent quarrel, Raynald’s younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room.

This would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald’s size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter.

When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: “My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills.” Raynald stayed in that room for ten years and wasn’t released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined he died within a year ... a prisoner of his own appetite.

Raynald’s bigger problem was the same problem many of us struggle with in America, self-control at the dinner table. Yet, it is not just our physical health that may suffer from a lack of self-control. It is also our spiritual life that suffers as well.

## Self-control is a proactive fruit

Self-control isn't just avoiding a bad response but being proactive about a good one. Prayer for example is not a fire extinguisher. Fire extinguishers are for the most part ignored until they are needed. I used one several years ago for a car fire out in front of the church. It was helpful for an emergency. Prayer is not a tool for emergencies. Prayer is a proactive part of Jesus' ministry. Routinely, Jesus went out alone and prayed. He made it a point to deliberately take time out to talk with the Heavenly Father.

Jesus was self-controlled with what he ate. At one point he went forty days in the wilderness without food while he was tempted by the devil (Matt 4).

Self-control includes disciplining ourselves to be in the Word of God. Even those like Nicodemus who had been in the Word His whole life did not understand Jesus' mission until it was revealed to him by Jesus from the scriptures (John 3). Same goes for the disciples from Emmaus—Jesus walked with them the whole time revealing what those scriptures meant and their hearts burned within them with a new appreciation and understanding (Luke 24).

Self-control means anticipating a conversation that may come from a person who routinely tries to get under our skin. Jesus knew the Pharisees would set traps to discredit Jesus. What is something constructive and faithful that may be said if you are in that situation?

Practicing self-control may also mean that we need to maintain a proactive stance with our budget and be careful with how we spend. It may also mean being realistic with a busy schedule. When we value self-control we are placing value on a Word centered faith and we are being proactive in our Spiritual life.

## Consider some things that help me to practice self-controlled.

1. Expect to be tested, so pray. In Ephesians 6 while Paul instructs us to put on the full armor of God he also says, in vs 18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."
2. Know what your triggers are. Do you have a temper? Do certain topics make you crazy? Do certain people push your buttons. Prepare for this. Look at Jesus' wilderness temptations in Matthew 4. Satan thought he knew Jesus' weaknesses, but he certainly knows yours. Better confront them before you are made vulnerable to temptation.
3. Consume the Word of God—Don't just casually read it. Make a diet of it. Romans 12:2 Reminds us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
4. Expect to fail but keep trying. Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."
5. Know your limitations and Confess them to the Lord. Turn to Jesus when you fall. Proverbs 28:13 – "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."
6. Remember that you are *practicing* self-control. Sin will not let you get it right every time. Philippians 4:8-9 says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."
7. Finally, remember that your strength is in Christ. Philippians 4:13—"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

May the Lord bless us with self-control.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His Face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods  
John 3:30