

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... SELF-CONTROL

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

Illustration – A number of years ago the Lay's Potato Chip company began an advertising campaign using the slogan, "Bet you can't eat just one." The idea, of course, was that their chips were so good and so enticing that once you started eating, you would not be able to control yourself enough to stop.

Someone has said that self-control is the capacity to break a chocolate bar into four pieces and then eat just one of the pieces.

Control is a necessary thing. It is a fearful thing to be out of control. Just think of these examples:

- A team of horses
- A river
- A fire

When controlled these are all a great benefit, and often beautiful to watch. But when they are out of control, the result is chaos and disaster. (*Review above examples out of control.*)

The same thing is true in our lives. Without control over our natural passions and desires, we can face incredibly bad consequences.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control (KJV – temperance)

Definition – the word in Greek is ἐγκρατεία – eng-krat'-i-ah, a compound word... **en** – in, by, with, on; **kratia** – strength, might, force, power, dominion.

When you put these together you get the idea of being in control, having dominion, control with power or might – hence self-control. The idea of the English word temperance, is being controlled, living in moderation, without excess.

So the implication of this term is that we are to be in control over all areas of life, by the power of the Spirit, who produces this power in us. This involves the whole being – body, soul (mind, will and emotions), and spirit.

Paul spoke of self-control over the body in 1 Cor. 9:27:

"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (...into subjection)

King Solomon talked of self-control in the book of Proverbs:

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23 ESV)

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." (Proverbs 25:28 ESV)

Perhaps this virtue was placed last on the list in Gal. 5:22-23, because it is the most difficult to develop or cultivate in our lives. But how much we need temperance and self-control in our lives as believers. The self-controlled life is a disciplined life.

As I look at my own life and experience, as well as the lives of others, I would suggest four major areas which cause control problems for believers. These are primarily related to our physical being, but ultimately they affect the soul and spirit as well.

These areas are: money, sex, food, and time – and not necessarily in that order. All of us are different. What causes a serious problem for one person may not for another.

I want us to consider each of these problem areas for a few moments this morning, and then look at the way to become a self-controlled, temperate, disciplined person.

I am not sure that I am really the person to be speaking on this subject, but I trust the Word of God to do its work in our hearts. So here goes...

I. Areas of Need

A. Money

We begin with the problem of self-control in the area of money and finance. There are two ways in which a lack of discipline can be seen in money matters. One is excessive spending, the other is excessive hoarding. Both of these are condemned in Scripture.

We don't have time, nor is this the place to go into a whole workshop on finances. However, let me just mention a couple of things.

Uncontrolled spending – sometimes this is simply a matter of spending too much. We live in a world where this is a constant problem. Credit is so easy to come by, and people often spend far more than they have – buy today, worry about paying for it tomorrow.

Sometimes it is not about spending too much, but spending with the wrong priorities – buying the unnecessary things and having nothing left for the important and necessary things in life.

So uncontrolled spending is a problem. As someone has said, "Some people need to undergo plastic surgery. They need to have their credit cards cut off."

Uncontrolled Hoarding – this is the opposite problem. Sometimes people are afraid to spend, even on basic needs, because of a fear of the future. Or there is a greediness, causing people to cling to their money and possessions so tightly that they are unable or unwilling to share anything with anyone else, even when there is a great need that they could easily meet.

B. Food

We are not going to spend much time on this one. I think we are all aware of what the Bible says about gluttony—uncontrolled eating habits. It is so easy to overlook this one. Many Christians will condemn the slightest intemperance in areas like gambling or drinking, yet show no temperance or self-control at all in their eating habits.

C. Sexual desire

This is a somewhat sensitive area and I do not want to say anything to offend anyone. However, this is one of the most difficult areas of life to gain self-control over. This is primarily, though not exclusively, true for men.

All of us, as we grow up, develop those natural desires which God built into us and which He intended to be fulfilled within the bond of marriage. However, He also intended that those desires and passions should be controlled and kept under strict discipline.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness." (1 Thess. 4:3-7)

There is, however, another aspect to this that is perhaps even more difficult to control. That is the mind—controlling the thought life. The Bible speaks quite a bit about controlling the mind in this area.

"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22 ESV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28 ESV)

The thought life is an area that needs constant discipline and control and nowhere is that more evident than in the area of sexual desire and lust and immoral thinking.

There are many other things that could be said, regarding the twisted and debased thinking in our world today, the deviant and aberrant attitudes and passions that are passed off as normal lifestyle choices. But let me just end this section with one more important verse from the Scriptures:

*"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,**" (2 Corinthians 10:4,5 NKJV)*

D. Time

There is one other area I want to mention, that is a great struggle for many people, including myself. That is the area of control over time.

It is so easy to waste time, minutes and hours slip away, unused, because we lack the discipline to make time work for us. I am amazed at

how quickly two or three hours can disappear when I am in my office during the mornings.

How often have you said, “I don’t have time?” Sometimes it is true. Sometimes there just are not enough hours to do all the things that we need to do. But often it is a sign that we are not controlling our time, but rather time is controlling us.

Somewhere I came across this interesting statement: “Don’t kill time, work it to death.” How many minutes a day do we just lose through lack of discipline?

- 5 minutes before dinner is ready – time to memorize a Bible verse.
- ½ hour between supper and whatever activity you have in the evening – enough time to write a note or email to someone who needs encouragement.
- 30 seconds waiting at a red light – time enough to say a prayer for someone who is suffering.

Eph. 5:16 says that we are to redeem the time, because the days are evil. We need to have our time under control – the control of the Spirit of God.

II. Becoming a Disciplined Person

So how does one become a disciplined person? How do we develop the self-control in our lives that produces victory in our walk with God?

A number of years ago I read a small book entitled, “The Disciplined Life” by Richard Shelley Taylor. He makes quite a list of suggestions about gaining self-control and discipline. I am only going to mention the first.

There are no shortcuts. The way to temperance and self-control is a long and arduous process which must begin and end with the Holy Spirit. After all, it is a fruit of the Spirit. And together with the Holy Spirit we must be determined to gain mastery over our lives.

We often look for a quick and easy formula to develop the characteristics or qualities we want or know we should have in our lives. But the truth is, there is no easy way. It takes commitment, determination and complete surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Conclusion

The fruit of the Spirit is...love, joy peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We have looked at these nine qualities the Spirit produces in us as we yield to Him. It begins with love, which must be the foundation of everything we are and everything we do. It ends with self-control, which is what is needed in order for any of these things to develop and grow in our life.

We need discipline—self-control over every area of our being:

Body – “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:27 ESV)

Soul (mind) – “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,” (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV)

Spirit – “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” (Proverbs 4:23 ESV)

Proverbs also has something to say about **the result** of self-control in our lives:

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” (Proverbs 16:32 ESV)