

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: SELF-CONTROL

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

Intro: We come today to the last of the nine characteristics which make up “the fruit of the Spirit” as they have been given to us by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22 and 23. The word we will be looking at is translated in the KJV, “temperance.” When the KJ was written it meant moderation in conduct, self-restraint, or even total abstinence from certain ways of life. Self-control is what temperance meant. In the NKJV, in the NIV, and in the NASB, the Greek word which Paul used is translated, “self-control.”

The Greek word is *ἐγκράτεια*. A friend of Dr. Jerry Bridges who was formerly a Greek teacher, said that self-control in the Bible lit. means “inner strength” (Bridges, Jerry, *The Fruitful Life*, p. 155). So you can see why “self-control” is a good translation.. The Spirit of God gives us inner strength to resist the temptations that come to us from the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Perhaps we can illustrate it by understanding what it means to grow up as children in our families. When we are young children, our parents (if they are doing their job) teach us to be obedient, to be courteous, to be honest, to be diligent in the good that we do, to learn from our mistakes, to be clean, just to name a few positive things. But as we get older we do all of those things because we want to. We may not always behave the way we should, but at least that is our goal.

Now the Bible tells us how we as the children of God are to live. We soon learn that we cannot do or be that which will please God. And so, again, if our parents are Christians, and doing what we need for them to do, they will tell us about the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us so that we will want to please God and so we will obey the Lord from our hearts. As Christians we never get to the place where we can live without the help of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the more we grow in the Lord, the more we will know that we need to keep trusting the Holy Spirit more and more.

As human beings, and as Christians, we grow from immaturity to maturity when we start doing what we ought to do because we want to do it and not just because as children in our families we do what our parents tell us

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to do, or we suffer the consequences. We get both the desire and the ability to please God from the Holy Spirit, but we need to learn to trust Him to help us to be what God wants us to be, and to do what pleases God, as well as not to do what displeases Him.

This same word which is translated “self-control” here in Galatians 5:23 is used two other times in the NT, and then there is another word which is related to this word that we are considering today, and I want you to see them in the hope that we will understand “self-control” as it applies to us as Christians. Of course we all need to understand that nobody can live as a Christian who has not first become a Christian. What we have been speaking about in connection with the fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, applies only to Christians because only Christians have the Holy Spirit living in them.

If you want to see these verses for yourself, I will try to go slowly enough so that you can find them before I talk about them. But you decide if you want to hear me read them, or if you want to look at them as I read them. I hope you will turn to them.

The first verse is Acts 24:25. This verse tells us about how the Apostle Paul preached. In fact, we have his outline here. Paul was defending himself and his ministry before a Roman governor by the name of Felix. It was a very critical time in the life of the Apostle Paul. I am going to read verse 24 with verse 25 so that you can see the setting. Listen to Acts chapter 24, verses 24 and 25:

24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Note Paul’s outline: “He reasoned” with Felix and Drusilla, “of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” I am sorry that Paul’s sermon was not recorded for us so we would know exactly what He said to this very important Roman official. But I think that we can come very close to knowing what Paul said from what we read in his epistles which we have in the NT. You know, Paul wrote thirteen of the NT epistles, and possibly fourteen. Now on this first point we have a lot of material in Paul’s epistles which tell us what Paul probably said to Governor Felix.

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We can be sure that Paul did not waste any time getting to the point. For example we have in Paul's letter to the church at Rome, this statement about righteousness. I am reading now from Romans 1, verses 16 and 17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

When Paul began to speak to Governor Felix, he didn't waste any time in getting to the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news about salvation. It declares the sinfulness of man who is under the judgment of God because of his sin. The Gospel tells us that God sent His Son to die on a Cross for sinners, taking the penalty for their sins upon Himself, so that those who believe in Him and in what He did, might have righteousness put to their account, and therefore be declared righteous before God.

Another verse that clearly shows what righteousness is, is in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church where he wrote these words:

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus Christ Who was not a sinner because He was the Son of God, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And since He was made sin for us, our sin offering, taking our penalty on Himself, now those who believe in Christ are made the righteousness of God in Him. Paul explained to Governor Felix that if he would trust in Christ, he would be forgiven of his sins and clothed in God's righteousness. And it would all be his as a free gift. And I am sure that Paul would have made it very clear that this was the only way a sinner would be forgiven by God. This was Paul's first point, and I am sure that he emphasized with Governor Felix he needed to trust Christ then and there.

Now let's go on to Paul's second point in his message to the Governor.

But what place would self-control have in a Gospel message? Do you remember that I have emphasized that the word for self-control spoke of an inner strength, or power, which is produced in us by the Holy Spirit?

Governor Felix had plenty of power attached to his name. Behind him was all of the authority and power of the Roman Empire. Actually the life of the Apostle Paul was in his hands. It is probably impossible for us to

realize how powerful this man was. But as powerful as he was, he was not strong enough to take a single step toward God. His title gave him no standing at all with God. He stood on the same ground before God that the worst sinner in the Empire. I don't think that the Apostle Paul would have made that comparison, but he would have made it very clear that if the Governor wanted to get right with God, He would have to cast himself on the grace and mercy of God just like anyone else. Neither his position, nor his power, nor his name would give him any special standing before God. He did not have within him the inner power to make himself acceptable to God. He had to come just like any other Gentile or any other Jew. That inner power to please God comes with salvation; it does not precede salvation. So much for the second point.

What was the third point? It was "judgment to come." That is where this Roman governor stood, where everybody else stands who is not trusting in Christ for salvation, facing the awful prospect of eternal judgment. I don't know how Paul approached this subject, but we do know that he spoke to the Governor about "judgment to come." Perhaps Paul told him what the Lord Jesus told a very powerful and influential Jew by the name of Nicodemus the words which we find in John 3:17-18:

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

What did the Governor need to do to be under the judgment of God? Nothing! That is where he was born. How could he escape the judgment of God. The Lord told us how in John 5:24:

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

But the tragedy in all of this with Governor Felix was that he "trembled" from what Paul told him, then he told Paul that he could go, and that he the Governor, would call for Paul at some future time, *but there is no record in Scripture that he ever did*. How tragic! If you don't turn to Christ when you can, there is the possibility that you never will.

But I must move along because I want to at least point out these other passages where our word is found.

You will find it 2 Peter 1:6 where the word "temperance," or "self-

control, is listed with a lot of other very important words for those of us who know the Lord.

For those of you who are acquainted with the life of the Apostle Peter, I think that you will agree with me when I say that in the early years of his life as an apostle, he had a lot of trouble with another self- word. The dictionary gives us a lot of self- words, and we hear a lot about some of them, even in Christian circles. Words like self-esteem, self-contentment, self-sufficient, self-importance, self-love, and many more. But Peter had trouble with self-confidence which is just the opposite of self-control. Self-confidence is self-trust. Self-control is learning to trust the Holy Spirit instead of trusting in our own wisdom, or our own strength. But Peter's trouble with self-confidence turned out to our advantage because he showed in his two epistles how deeply burdened he was for the believers in his day, and that burden has come down to us in his epistles.

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter, chapter 1. I want to begin reading with verse 2, and let us pay particular attention to the way his words showed his deep concern for the believers to whom he was writing. And we need to profit from this voice of experience. Listen to these words:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2-8).

Let me single out one point. Let me ask, how can we add to our self-control if self-control is basically a work of the Holy Spirit? I add to what the Holy Spirit does in my heart by making sure that I am learning to trust

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the Holy Spirit more and more, and learning to trust myself less and less. Peter's failures taught him two very important lessons: the first, that he was a fool to trust in himself, and second, that he was a fool not to be growing in his trust in the Spirit of God. What blessings await us as we learn to put our trust in the Holy Spirit for our daily lives and service, and to keep it there!

Now along that line, let me give you one more verse before I close. And this verse belongs to our elders especially, so that as you see this in our lives, you will follow along with us. This is not the same word that I have been pointing out to you, but it has the same root so it belongs to the same family. It is found in Titus 1, verse 8. But I will read verse 7 with it so we all can make the connection:

7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate [or self-controlled] (Titus 1:7-8).

Concl: I want to give all of you a prayer request as I close. Will you pray for all of us who are elders, and for the deacons also, that we will all be learning more and more about what it is to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit, and that we will not be inclined to depend upon ourselves at all. And we will be praying that you, too, will follow our examples, and join us in a walking in the Spirit, getting our power from Him, We need that "inner strength" given to us by the Holy Spirit which is the difference between victory and defeat in our walk with the Lord.

I want to spend one more week on this "fruit of the Spirit" to show from the Word how we lay hold of this power.

Closing prayer: Eph. 3:14-21.