

Prone to Wander
The Fruit of the Spirit – *Self Control*
November 13, 2016

Call to Worship: Galatians 5:16-25 (ESV)

I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 11 (David & Bathsheba)

This morning we are concluding our series looking at the last *Fruit of the Spirit* from Galatians 5:22-23 and at first glance, just the title, “Self-Control,” seems to be in contradiction to what we have talked about so far with the other eight fruit of the Holy Spirit - that being that most of it is accomplished not by our power but by the power of God’s Holy Spirit working within us.

Though most of it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we do have a part to play and it’s important that we don’t forget that. And it is probably no coincidence that “Self-Control” is the last fruit listed by the apostle Paul. Just like it is probably no coincidence that he begins the list with the spiritual fruit of “love.”

When we read Galatians 5 in its entire context we find that living in the power of the Holy Spirit is in direct contrast to living in the power of our sinful, fleshly nature – that which resides in all of us from birth. That sinful nature is part of all of our lives and the only way to control it is to live by the Spirit.

“Self-Control” is the answer to the question, “How do we keep from yielding to the desires of the sinful nature?”

Many people have self-control in some areas of their lives and are falling apart in others. The Evangelist Billy Graham wrote many years ago:

“There are men who command armies but cannot command themselves. There are men who by their burning words can sway vast multitudes but who cannot keep silent under provocation or wrong. The highest mark of nobility is self-control. It is more kingly than regal crown and purple robe.”
From, *The Collected Works of Billy Graham*

“The ancient stoics used the term ‘self-control’ to describe a characteristic of a person who was able to morally restrain himself when tempted by evil pleasures. In the New Testament it refers to allowing the Holy Spirit to empower a person so that he or she is able to voluntarily abstain from anything that might hinder fulfillment of his or her divinely appointed task.”

The Fruit of the Spirit: Becoming the Person God wants You to Be, Thomas Trask & Wayde Goodall

Actually the Greek word translated “self-control” is a combination of two Greek words: *en krastos*. *En*, means “in” and *krastos* means “strength, power, might or rule.” . A person with *en krastos*, a person who has “self-control,” is a person who has strength within.

We have translated the Greek word *krastos* into several words in our English language. Like “democratic” - demo meaning people and cratic (from *krastos*) meaning power, the power/rule of the people. And, “theocratic” – theo meaning God and cratic meaning power, the power/rule of God. And autocratic – auto meaning self and cratic meaning power, the power or rule of ourselves .

So the question we must ask ourselves is “who is ruling our lives?” Is it me or is it God? Is it the power of the Holy Spirit which is within me or is it the power of the sinful nature which still lies within me?

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Proverbs 25:28

King David was a man who did so many good things for God, a man who is the author of most of the Psalms that we read, a man who God referred to as “a man after my own heart.” Yet David was a man who fell so greatly. The apostle James writes:

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

James 1:12-15 (ESV)

Usually sin comes at the end of a long progression. It begins when we lose focus and get distracted. For David it was when he had some extra time on his hands. While most of the others are out fighting a war, David finds himself at home with nothing to do. The Bible tells us it was “in the springtime when kings go out to battle.” Being a king, that’s where David should have been. And then *it happened, late one afternoon*. David is up on the roof of his palace, which was designed to sit high above all the other buildings and he looks down and he sees this beautiful woman bathing, on the roof of her house. David is tempted by his own desire. He could have looked away, he could have gone inside and gotten busy doing something else, but after being tempted he was lured and enticed by his own evil desire. David, being king, was used to getting whatever he wanted so he sent his messengers, his servants, to get her. Her who turned out to be Bathsheba.

Bathsheba whose husband, Uriah, was out where he was supposed to be, fighting the war. Bathsheba, who was probably lonely, and what woman wouldn't have responded when summoned by the King. It was really a recipe for disaster. And the rest of the story is history. David commits adultery with Bathsheba, Bathsheba becomes pregnant, and David ends up putting Uriah on the frontline of the battle, withdraws the other soldiers, and basically has Uriah killed to cover up his sin. A sin which will lead to consequences for David and his descendants for generations.

What happened to David should be a warning to all of us. We don't have to go to the roof top of our palaces today, we just need to go to our room, close the door and click a button.

As someone who didn't grow up with a lot of good worship music to sing (after all good worship music is not one of the things most Roman Catholic churches are known for), I have come to appreciate many of the good hymns that we sing, as well as a lot of the praise music we sing today, but I am more drawn to the words. And last Sunday (in the first service) we sung one of my favorites, "Come, Thou Fount," and the words really struck me, especially when we get towards the end:

Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my **wandering** heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

"Bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, prone to leave the God I love!
That's not just King David with that one incident with Bathsheba. That's you and me every day. It might not be the big sins like sexual immorality, or adultery, or murder (though it might). It might be a host of little ones – jealousy, anger, gossip, judgmentalism, unforgiveness, pornography, addictions (alcohol, drugs, social media, food, etc.), materialism, strife, dissension, etc. Need I go on?

"Self Control" is pretty much synonymous with "self discipline," and we really struggle with any kind of discipline today, including self-discipline.

Paul writes to the early Christians in Ephesus:

Put off your old self, that which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)

"Putting off our old self" is no easy matter. Our "self" centeredness, our "self" pity, our "self"ishness.

Missionary and Bible teacher Derek Prince writes, "Self is one of the toughest weeds that grows in the garden of life."

Our capitalistic society functions best when we over indulge; whether it be food, drink, sports, sex, social media, work, buying things. Our capitalistic society works best when there is little or no “self-control.” The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.” The writer of Ecclesiastes was King Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. Ecclesiastes is the story of his life, looking back over all those years of indulging in whatever his heart desired. And his conclusion? It was all meaningless. *“Meaningless! Meaningless!,” says the teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”*

He concludes with these words:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 (ESV)

While “self control” and “self discipline” are synonymous, “self control” is not synonymous with “self effort.” Just like all the other fruit of the spirit, any “self effort” apart from dependence on Christ and the Holy Spirit is destined to fail. “Self effort” is just that, focused on self.

One of my favorite pastors and teachers is Alistair Begg, and recently he too completed a series on *The Fruit of the Spirit*. He provides this excellent definition of biblical “self-control”: “Self control is the Holy Spirit enabled ability to avoid excesses and to stay within the God given boundaries.”

God gives us those boundaries not to punish us, but for our own good.

“Self-Control” or “Self-Discipline” is not just about preventing us from what we perceive to be good things, or depriving us from those things. It is also about focusing on what really are the good things:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9 (ESV)

For those few who might be following along with the Bible reading schedule of reading through the Bible in a year, this past week we looked at the Gospel of Mark and we had the story of Jesus’ **cleansing** the temple. Jesus said, “my house will be called a house of prayer.” At the same time we were reading through the Old Testament Book of Exodus and the establishment of the original temple – the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle, the bronze altar and the consecration of the priests – and how particular God was about everything. God required a holy place to worship. In Old Testament times that’s where God’s Spirit was present most.

Then we get to New Testament times and we are told that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

In his letter to Titus, Paul is mostly writing about qualifications for the leaders of the early church, but his hope is that someday all Christians would get there, and “self-control” is paramount. He says older men, older women, younger women and younger men need to be self-controlled. Why?

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ **waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,** ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.* Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)

If you find yourself this morning stressed out and with much anxiety over the recent election and all the uncertainty of what lies ahead for America, perhaps that anxiety is a reminder that we have put our hope in the wrong place.

We end our series this morning on the Fruit of the Holy Spirit just as we are about to enter into a very special time of year on the Christian calendar. Believe it or not in two weeks we begin the season of Advent. A time which is supposed to bring our attention around once again to where we find our ultimate hope. It started with a small baby in a manger whose name was Jesus and it will end with the glorious reappearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. The Sunday in between. Next Sunday, we will pause to give thanks to God for all that He has given us, even in, and especially in a very broken and fallen world.