**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Self-Control**

This morning I want to talk about a quality that is essential in living the life of a Christian, and that is essential to going to heaven, and that quality is self-control.

Self-control is one of the qualities that we must add to our faith. Peter said in 2 Peter 1:5-7, *“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”* Also, self-control is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. If we walk by the Spirit then we will produce the fruit of the Spirit which includes self-control. Paul said in Galatians 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”*

What is self-control? What role does it play in our service to God? What if it is lacking in my life? How can I develop it? These are questions we want to consider on our program today.

The quality of self-control has to do with the control of our tongues, our tempers, our thoughts, our passions and appetites. It has to do with the control of ourselves generally. The person who exercises self-control rules his tongue, he is not ruled by his tongue; he rules his temper, not ruled by his temper; he rules his appetites, not ruled by his appetites; etc. Proverbs 25:28 says, *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls.”*  Self-control is ruling over your own spirit. Proverbs 16:32 says, *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”* Even those things that are not sinful, they are lawful to do, they must not have control over me. Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:12, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”* In this context Paul is talking about the eating of certain foods that were lawful to do. But he is saying that even in this area of things that are lawful, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” If eating these foods will cause a brother to stumble, I will not eat it. Even if it is lawful for me to eat this food, this food will not control me, I will control it, Paul is saying. Paul here is talking about exercising self-control.

Why is self-control so vital in our service to God? It is vital because it affects our ability to determine the direction of our own lives. We need to understand that there is a constant vying or competing for our affections. On the one hand there is the devil. Peter says that the devil is our adversary who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). But while he walks about like a roaring lion to devour us, he doesn’t come in the appearance of such. He comes pretending to be a friend, he holds before us enticements; he promises pleasure, popularity, and a good time. But the Bible says he is a liar (John 8:44), and that he deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9). His way is attractive – it is the wide gate and the broad way – but the discerning person sees the devil’s way as the way to destruction, the way to a ruined life. And so he looks for an alternative.

And there is an alternative. It is the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is also vying for our attention. He says in Matthew 11:28, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* Jesus invites all to come and submit to Him. He said to the lukewarm church in Laodicea, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* (Rev. 3:20) While there are difficulties to be faced in coming to Jesus, there are wonderful blessings that far outweigh the difficulties – friends who are real friends, fellowship with God, forgiveness of sin, freedom from guilt, peace of mind, self-respect, and at the end eternal life in heaven. The discerning person has no problem choosing the Lord’s way. If I ask you, “which way should you go, the way of the devil or the way of the Lord?” my guess is, all of us would say, “the way of the Lord.”

But now the problem comes – who is in control of me? Do I have control so as to be able to give myself to the Lord as I desire, or am I ruled by something else, something else that is an obstacle to giving myself to Him?

Many people are ruled by their habits. They have used profanity for so long; or they have been wasteful for so long; or they have gambled for so long, that they do not rule themselves, but they are ruled by their habits. Their habit has become such a part of them that they almost do it without thinking. The decision to serve the Lord is stalled because their habit is in control. Some people are controlled by narcotics. Alcohol is the king in the lives of so many people; so is nicotine, or cocaine, or heroin. The person does not rule self, he is enslaved by whatever drug it might be. Others are ruled by their passions such as anger, hate, jealousy, sexual desires, etc. Such people will do things in a fit of rage or in a fit of jealousy, or when driven by their lusts, which they did not, a few minutes earlier, intend to do. It is because they do not have control over their passions. Others are ruled by social pressure, sometimes we call it peer pressure. Young people can make resolutions that they sincerely intend to keep, but will break them within hours of the time they made them. Why? Peer Pressure. The desire to please friends has become the ruler of their lives. Others people are ruled by the love of money. Dollar marks are in front of their eyes. They will do most anything for the “almighty dollar.”

These are some of the things that rule us, and become obstacles to our serving the Lord. The person in his mind is saying, “I will serve the Lord,” but the real ruler of his life says, “no you won’t, I’m in control here.”

Is there a solution to this problem? There must be because self-control is commanded. As we stated earlier it must be added to our faith (2 Peter 1:5-7). It is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). It must be attainable since the Lord requires it of us. But some people seem to think that because of the weaknesses of the flesh we are not capable of exercising self-control in all temptations. And they seem to think that Jesus understands our weaknesses and He understand that we are just not going to be able to practice self-control in all areas of our lives. They may quote Jesus’ statement in Matthew 26:41, where He said, *“the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* They interpret that to mean that the Lord understands that sometimes our flesh is too weak to do what we know we ought to do. We want to do right, but we can’t. Our flesh is too weak. But this is not what Jesus is saying in this passage. Consider the context of the passage. This is when Jesus was at Gethsemane and told Peter, James and John, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”* Jesus wanted His disciples to watch with Him during His time of need. Jesus then went a little further and prayed to the Father. When He came back to Peter, James and John He found them sleeping, and He said to Peter, *“What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Jesus here is not excusing His disciples. He expected them to stay awake and watch with Him. He does not tell them to watch with Him, and to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation, and then excuse them for not doing it. Jesus is not excusing them because of their weaknesses, but He is reprimanding them. Yes, the flesh may be weak, but that did not excuse His disciples’ failure to exercise the self-control they needed to do what the Lord had commanded.

Self-control is commanded, and we can have it during times of temptation if we choose to do so.

What can we do to gain self-control?

First of all, determine to struggle, to wage a fight against whatever it is that enslaves you. Suppose you lived in Africa in the early 1800s and the slave traders were coming closer to your village to gather up people to be enslaved. They are enclosing in on you – what would you do? You would struggle to get away. We ought to make the same kind of struggle or fight toward those things that would enslave us, our passions, drugs, peer pressure, etc. The enslavement of sin will send us to hell. Therefore, we need to determine to struggle and fight. Jesus said in Luke 13:24, *“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”* Notice, Jesus said, *“STRIVE to enter through the narrow gate.”* The Greek word from which the word “strive” is translated is *agonizomai*. We get the word agonize from this Greek word. The word means “to contend,” “to fight.” It was used of those who contended in the athletic games. Those running in a race would agonize and strain every nerve to win. They would struggle with all their might to win the prize. We need to strive, that is to struggle and strain with all our might to enter the narrow gate. Eternal life in heaven is a far greater prize than any crown or trophy one may win in the athletic games. If we are going to enter heaven, self-control is essential, and that will require a determination to struggle and fight, and not to give up on the fight. Let me illustrate it like this. There was a young boy who had just gotten a pair of roller skates. He had never skated before, and he so desperately wanted to learn. He put the skates on, stood up and fell. He got up and fell again. And he got up and fell again. Every time he got up it was not long before he would fall. The palms of his hands were bleeding, his knees were scraped. A man passing by, observing what was happening said to the young fellow, “son, stop doing that. You are hurting yourself.” The young lad said, “Mister, I didn’t get these skates to give up with, I got them to learn with.” We didn’t’ become Christians to give up. We became Christians to please God and go to heaven, and that requires striving, struggling, fighting with all our might to do right. That is how we gain self-control.

Secondly, we need to study the Bible regularly. The Bible is the word of God. It is the words revealed by the Holy Spirit. To walk by the Spirit we must fill our hearts with the word, and struggle to put it into practice in our lives. As we walk by the Spirit we will produce the fruit of the Spirit which includes self-control.

Thirdly, if we are to gain self-control, we must pray. In praying we seek God’s help. In Ephesians chapter 3 Paul states a prayer he prayed for the Ephesian saints. In this prayer he says, *“that He* [that is God] *would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”* We need to ask God that He will strengthen us with might through His Spirit in the inner man. As we struggle and pray for strength, God will be with us, and help us to have the self-control we need to fight those things that will enslave us.

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