

Self-Control

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One of the fruits of God's holy spirit is the ability to exercise self-control,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, **self-control**. Against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; emphasis added).

When self-control is absent, people are more likely to commit various sins. These are referred to in scripture as “works of the flesh”,

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God** (Gal. 5:19-21; emphasis added).

Where there is no revelation (revealing of truth; cf. 1Sam. 3:1), the people cast off restraint (do not exercise self-control); but happy is he who keeps the law (Prov. 29:18; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Life offers many temptations and how a person responds will determine whether they commit any of the sins mentioned in Galatians 5. Choosing to sin will lead to actions that are harmful not only to the offender, but everyone around them,

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear (your prayers) (Isa. 59:2; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt. 26:41; cf. Mk. 14:38).

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place-unless you repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1Pet. 2:11).

Sin separates an individual from God and it is a process that can sometimes start in a small way. The Apostle Paul compares this process to the action of leaven,

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1Cor. 5:6; cf. Gal. 5:9)?

The war for control of our minds takes place on an ongoing basis even for those who have repented of sin and been baptized,

For what I (Paul) am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom 7:15-24; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? ²You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. ⁴Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The spirit who (that) dwells in us yearns jealously"? ⁶But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
⁷Therefore submit to God. **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (Jas. 4:1-11; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

It is not God who tempts us. Instead, we are tempted when our own desires, and the influence of the Adversary (1Pet. 5:8), draw us away from the values of our heavenly Father (Jas. 1:13-15). This is why we are admonished to maintain our relationship with Him daily (Ps. 88:9; Isa. 58:2; Dan. 11:31; Mt. 6:11; Lk. 9:23; Ac. 17:17) and persevere despite various temptations and trials that easily ensnare us (Heb. 12:1). It takes endurance and perseverance to "fight the good fight" until the end of our life (cf. Jos. 10:25; 1Tim. 6:12; 2Tim. 4:7). At the same time, God knows our every thought and desire (cf. 1Chr. 28:9), as well as our limitations. He will not allow any challenge to come into our lives that we are not able to handle or that will not serve to strengthen us in the long run (1Cor. 10:13).

For those who are seeking diligently to learn God's truth and serve Him faithfully (see study: Faith; cf. Heb. 11), their basic needs will be provided. God's promise, in this regard, is meant to strengthen our relationship with Him as we learn to trust His word. By not fixating on finances and materialism, we can make choices daily that are in accordance with His law and commandments, without fear of lacking our basic needs,

The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But **those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing** (Ps. 34:10; emphasis added; cf. Ps. 84:11b).

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you' (Mt. 6:30-33).

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Mt. 6:34).

Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit';¹⁴ whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that' (Jas. 4:13-15).

Self-control not only benefits us as individuals, it also enables us to more effectively assist others (cf. 1Cor. 9:27). Therefore, we must learn not to be self-centered, but to practice sacrifice which is a form of Godly love,

Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He (God) Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'⁶ So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?' (Heb. 13:5-6; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:16).

We also need to accept that God is guiding the development and spiritual growth of other individuals (Ps. 34:22). We are not in control of them (Ps. 73:24; Rom. 2:19; cf. 1Cor. 13:15). Attempting to control or manipulate others is not the way that God teaches,

Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother.¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother' (Zec 7:9-10; cf. Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 25:17; Dt. 23:16; 24:14; 2Sam. 7:10; Ps. 10:18; Hos. 12:7).

God does not oppress, but the Adversary does,

As for the Almighty, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress (Job 37:23).

Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: 'Is this the man (ref. to Satan) who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms,¹⁷ who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?' (Isa 14:16-17; Ed. note in parenthesis).

We all have our own sins to face and trials to overcome (cf. Mt. 7:23; cf 6:2, 5, 16; 16:3; 23:13-29; 24:50-51; Mk. 7:6). For this reason, it is imperative that each individual focus on improving their own life with every decision before them (Mt. 7:3-5).

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Php. 2:12; cf. Ps. 7:16; cf. 2Chr. 6:23).

By acting with self-control and leading purposeful lives, in line with God's law and commandments, we become living examples to those around us of God's way of life, just as Christ did,

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.¹⁸For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18).

For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth (3Jn. 1:3).

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,⁶to knowledge **self-control**, to **self-control perseverance**, to perseverance godliness,⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness (spiritual), and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pet. 1:5-11; emphasis added; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Those who have served God throughout man's history have been met with hostility (cf. Gen. 4:5-8; Heb. 11:37), and this will continue until the return of Christ (cf. Jn. 15:18). Others may not like it when they cannot control our thoughts and decisions or what we say while striving to serve God to the best of our ability. They may also dislike how our choices affect their emotions or lives, but we cannot allow that to change our convictions - providing we are acting in accordance with God's word,

Let no one despise your youth, but **be an example** to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1Tim. 4:12; emphasis added).

Self-control will become less valued and even more difficult to exercise as society becomes more self-serving and self-centered. The lack of self-control is one of the characteristics that will make life in the last days more perilous,

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:²For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,³unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, **without self-control**, brutal, despisers of good,⁴traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!⁶For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts,⁷always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2Tim. 3:1-7; emphasis added).

This should encourage God's people to exercise self-control and serve as an example to others,

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.¹¹Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord--that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (Jas. 5:10-11).

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.²An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,³not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle,

peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?) (1Tim. 3:1-5; cf. 2Thes. 3:7-9).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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