

Saying “No” to Self

I’m writing on this subject not because I’ve mastered *self-control* and want to share the keys to my success, but because I need to be reminded of the dangers associated with its lack, and further develop the ability to say “No” to self.

When the “*fruit of the Spirit*” list concludes with “*self-control*” in Galatians 5:22, the epitaph reads, “*against such things there is no law.*” I realize that this inscription applies to all of the individual attitudes and actions listed rather than just to *self-control*. But may I suggest that unless we master this last one, *self-control*, we’ll never really produce the others on the list? How would one bear true *love*, or *patience*, or *kindness*, or *gentleness* toward others without first yielding *self* to the Spirit’s control? Perhaps it’s just me (but I doubt it), but the ability to say “No” to myself is the most important, and difficult to master, of the list. And yet, how can I be *faithful* to God, *loving* toward others, and *joyously* at *peace* with God, man, and myself, without it?

Think for a moment about the havoc that is manifested in our lives due a lack of *self-control*:

- If we don’t say “No” to our appetites for food, we can become *gluttonous beasts* with all sorts of obesity-related illnesses and problems, cf. Titus 1:12;
- If we don’t say “No” to our carnal lusts, we can become *fornicators*, *adulterers*, or some other form of *sexually impure* person, cf. 1Thessalonians 2:1-7;
- If we don’t say “No” to our desire for money and the things it can buy, we can become not only *covetous*, but *idolaters*, cf. Ephesians 5:5;
- If we don’t say “No” to our own personal interests, we will never be anything but selfish toward one another, cf. Philippians 2:3-4; and,
- If we don’t say “No” to our longings for pleasure and entertainment, we will not put God and His interests *first*, cf. Matthew 6:33 and Hebrews 10:19-25.

Now take a step back and look at what can be (or is being?) ruined by our unwillingness to simply say “No” to self: our *health*; our *marriages*; our *finances*; our *personal relationships* with others; and our *spiritual relationship* with God. What else is there that could be destroyed by a lack of *self-control*? There is only one thing of which I am aware that can’t be devastated by our unwillingness to say “No” to self: our relationship with Satan!

Satan is “*the father of lies*” (John 8:44), and the one that he uses particularly well with regard to our lack of self-control is, “**I just couldn’t help myself,**” or its cousin, “**I just have no self-control.**” Let’s take these one at a time...

“**I just couldn’t help myself.**” This is a lie- no doubted aided and abetted by Satan, we tell ourselves to feel better about failure. The truth is “We **didn’t** help ourselves.” Help was available. God’s Word didn’t disappear. Prayer wasn’t offline. The strength and encouragement of godly brethren wasn’t unavailable. And 1Corinthians 10:13 assures us, based on the very *faithfulness of God*, that He will “*not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,*” so, “**I couldn’t** help myself is a lie.” You (or I!) simply **didn’t** help yourself by using the readily available resources!

“**I just have no self-control.**” This is another lie. You and I may not be using the ability to control ourselves the Creator instilled within us, but it IS there nonetheless! How do I know this? The same way I know everything that is really worth knowing- the Word of God. Read carefully James 1:12-16 and notice:

- v.12, God is pleased by and *blesses* those who *perseveres under trial* (and *overcomes*)- how so, if I (or you) do not possess the ability to say “No” to self?
- vv.13-14, God is not the *source* of our *temptations*- *we* are. *Lust* (sexual or otherwise) is something we allow to take root and grow in our hearts. But we have the ability to *pull it up* by the roots and throw it on the burn pile! Isn't that what *free moral agency* is all about?
- v.15, Otherwise, *lust* will bear the fruit of *sin*, and we will reap only the harvest of *spiritual death*.
- v.16, Regarding these points (and those that follow in vv.17-18), we must *not be deceived!*

We don't *have to sin* because God has given us the ability to choose, and the power to do right rather than wrong. We just need to stop believing Satan's lies and use them!

Believe me, I get it- saying “No” to self can be hard. If it was easy, everyone would be doing it- they're not. But you can learn to say “No” to self... in fact, you and I must do so if we're going to be pleasing to God and attain heaven! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)