

Self-Control #1, *What it is, and why it is so important*

Do you ever watch late night television? Insomniacs often do. Watching something *mindless* sometimes helps to get the brain to “disengage” and relax. But have you ever noticed them the late night television commercial? You can “fix” everything from bad credit and bankruptcy to over-eating and obesity (and leaky gutters)- usually with a “free” or “no cost or obligation” phone call, or at least \$19.95 plus shipping & handling! But there seems (at least to me) to be a common thread to these ads: Many if not most of them propose to “fix” either the symptoms or consequences of a *lack of self-control*. Listed last (but certainly not *least*) in the “*fruit of the Spirit*,” **self-control** is certainly among such *things against which*, “*there is no law*,” Gal.5:22-23. But understanding, developing, and mastering it would probably eliminate most of the current late night television commercials!

What is *self-control*?

By definition, *self-control* is “restraint or discipline exercised over one’s behavior” (Nelson’s Three-In-One Bible Reference Companion, p.622). But I disagree with this definition for a simple reason: *self* is not equal to “behavior.” *Self* is much more than just “behavior,” or the control or discipline exercised over it.

Self-control is, instead, the *control* of *self* in all of its constituent parts; or, the *control* of *everything* that makes us who we are... which is much more than just our “behavior”! To illustrate this point, the “behavior” of *the church in Ephesus* was admirable, Rev.2:2-3; but their *true self* was very different, Rev.2:4-5.

What is the *origin/source* of *self-control*?

Sometimes, *self-control* was given directly by Jesus. In Luke 8:26-27,29, there was a man who had NO *self-control* at all (admittedly, because “*many demons had entered him*,” v.30). But notice that after Jesus *cast out the demons*, the man was found “*sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind*,” v.35. **I am not suggesting** that it will require a miraculous exorcism for *us* to develop and manifest *self-control*. **I am suggesting** that true *self-control* is of God (cf. Gal.5:23), and the lack thereof is of Satan, as per this account!

Though *self-control* was sometimes granted by miracle, I wouldn’t recommend depending on such today. Instead, note 2Pet.1:2-11 with me. If we are to “*become partakers of the divine nature*” and thereby “*escape(d) the corruption that is in the world by lust*,” v.4, **we must**:

1. “**apply all diligence**”- The Greek term *spoude* (*spoo-day*), translated as *diligence*, refers to *haste* or *earnestness in accomplishing* or *striving after* anything. It is modified by “*all*” (*pas*) with the resultant meaning *to bring every effort to* (our *striving after* or *earnestness in accomplishing*). Thus, we are to *make every effort*, or *to try as hard as possible*. Such is not indicative of half-hearted or “only on Sundays” efforts, but to instead *do your very best*. But *do your very best* to what?
2. “**in your faith**”- Now we see the *realm* of effort. It is in the *spiritual realm* of *faith* in which the above *diligent effort* is required. Since “*faith*” comes from *hearing the Word of God* (Rom.10:17), it is directly linked back to “*the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” of v.2, which is the *means* by which we are “*granted... everything pertaining to life and godliness*,” v.3, and thus “*become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust*,” v.4! To such *faith* (*based in and derived from* the “*true knowledge of Him called us by His own glory and excellence*, v.3b) we must “*apply all diligence*” to...

3. **“supply”**- The word translated as “supply” (by the NASB, or *add* in the KJV, or *supplement* in the ESV) is an interesting one. *Ephichoregeo* (*ep-ee-khor-ayg-ee-o*) means basically *to supply or furnish*. But it is derived from the root word *chorageo*, which is *to fit out a chorus by procurement and supply*; or more literally, *to lead a chorus*. Think of an orchestra. We are to *supply* and *lead* them in an harmonious way to produce a beautiful piece of music; in this case, we are to *procure/supply* and *conduct* ALL that follows in vv.5b-7 (*i.e.* the *Christian graces* of these verses) in a way that produces *usefulness* and *fruitfulness*, v.8, and *security* and *steadfastness*, vv.10-11.
4. **Self-Control is the very beating heart of all of these Christian graces.** Think about it further with me. Can one who lacks the ability to *control self* develop and manifest true *moral excellence* (*backbone*; the opposite of *cowardice*)? Is there any real benefit to spiritual *knowledge* without the *self-control* necessary to implement (wisdom)? Can one *persevere* even *in faith* without *self-control*? Will *godliness* (*godlikeness*) ever be possible without *self-control*? Without *self-control* over the emotions will one ever be able to practice *brotherly kindness*? Or without *self-control*, develop and manifest real *Christian love*? Surely *self-control* is essential to not only *having* but *increasing* in these other “graces,” v.8!

What does all this mean? If we are to *possess* and *increase* in these “Christian graces,” and thereby become *useful* and *fruitful* in *faith* and *knowledge*, and ultimately attain *steadfastness* in life and *security* in/for eternity, we **MUST** first master ourselves! And to do so, we must understand that...

Self-Control requires mastery of ALL parts of SELF rather than just our behavior. In fact, simple *behavior modification* is working on the “hind leg” of the problem. To truly change/modify our *behavior*, **we must first learn to control our:**

- **Thoughts.** “No,” you may not be able to control everything that *pops into* your mind; but you can and must control what you allow to *take up residence* there, Phil.4:8.
- **Emotions.** Gaining control over your emotions is not only possible, it is imperative. “Yes,” you can (and again *must*) control your emotions, cf. Matt.15:18-19. We can be *angry*, but must control our emotions so that we “*do not sin*” in our through it, Eph.4:26.
- **Passions.** By this I mean our *desires*- including but not limited to *lust* (which *inordinate* or *excessive desire*). Such is described as *crucifixion of the flesh* “*with its passions and desires*,” Gal.5:24. We are to “*consider*” (*regard* and *treat*) such “*members of (y)our earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry*,” Col.3:5. We certainly cannot *crucify* and regard as *dead* that which cannot control- our *passions* and *desires*, see also 1Thess.4:3-7.
- **Bodies.** Your *thoughts*, your *emotions*, and your *passions/desires* control your body. To *control* the latter, you must control the former. Do **you control your body** (by controlling your *thoughts*, *emotions*, and *desires*), or **does it control you** (by controlling your *thoughts*, *emotions*, and *desires*)? Paul mastered his, 1Cor.9:24-27.

Conclusion: There is “*no law*” against self-control. But without it, we will never see heaven, and may well influence others from attaining it either. “**Example**” is powerful. Your *self-control* will enable your eternal security and can inspire others to glory and honor; or your lack of *self-control* will mean eternal condemnation for you, and may well influence others to the same fate.