

Fruit of The Spirit: Self-Control

Adapted from the Fruit of the Spirit, John.W. Sanderson

INTRODUCTION

Self-control is the ninth and last of the fruits of the Spirit listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. Though it is listed last, there can be no doubt about its importance to Christian living. Can a Christian be uncontrolled in his manner of life and still be a Christian? Hardly! Sons of God, as exemplified by Jesus Christ and the apostles, are models of lives controlled under the guiding hand of God without relinquishing their free moral agency.

In Galatians 5:23, "self-control" (*temperance*, KJV) is the translation of the Greek **word *egkrateia***, which means "possessing power, strong, having mastery or possession of, and continent, self-controlled. The word thus refers to the mastering of one's desires and impulses, and does not in itself refer to the control of any specific desire or impulse. It is implied, however, in many exhortations to obedience, submission and sinless living.

[FA leaders, discuss with the members on what do they understand as self-control]

Power without control is dangerous. A strong horse which is not tamed can hurt its rider. Atomic power if controlled carefully can generate electricity for household and industry (nuclear power plant). But when it's uncontrolled, it can destroy the whole city (atomic bomb). How can we exercise self control in such a fast world filled with lots of temptations? Let us study together on what we should cultivate and what we should weed away in order to bear this fruit.

SHARING

1. What we should cultivate

a. Learn to lean on the Holy Spirit as our Counsellor

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever (John 14:16, NIV)
For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7, ESV)

God gives His Spirit to us to begin the spiritual creation that will bring us into His very image. Instead of taking and making the decision based on our flesh, we turn to God the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that, "Trust in the Lord and lean not upon your own understanding but in all ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6). The more we turn to God the Holy Spirit, the more He is able to guide us and set our paths straight and glorify God. If you can't control your anger, appetite or lust, turn to the Lord and ask Holy Spirit to give you strength and guidance to flee away from temptations.

Trust Jesus Christ, and ask Him to govern your life. Ask Him for more of God's Holy Spirit, and He will help you to control yourself. He will not fail in what He has promised because the request fits perfectly into God's purpose of creating sons in His image.

b. Learn to have an athlete Self-Control

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. (1 Corinthians 9:24-26, NKJV)

Paul uses runners in the Grecian games as examples of how we are to live as Christians. The first thing to notice is the utmost tension, energy and strenuous effort pictured by athletes straining for the finish line in hope of the glory of winning. This requires steady, intense concentration, of focus, by the runners. They cannot afford to become distracted by things off to the side of their course. If they do, their effectiveness in running will surely diminish. Keeping focused requires control—not allowing distractions to interfere with the responsibility at hand.

Paul then says the victorious runner sets Christians an example of rigid self-control: "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in **all** things." It is not only a matter of concentrating while he is racing, but in all areas of life because his whole life impacts on the race. The runner diligently follows a rigorous program within a rigid schedule each day, eats healthily and rest sufficiently. Throughout, he not only avoids sensuous indulgences, he must also abstain from many perfectly legitimate things that simply do not fit into his program.

Likewise, we should try to emulate the athlete's self-control in our spiritual lives. We should focus on the crown that God will reward us at the finishing point of our race. Daniel led a life of self-control. He and his friends did not indulge in the king's food although from the world's point of view seemed better for them. On his prayer life, he prays regularly (3 times a day in Daniel 6:10). Daniel showed that he had a lot of self-control in his life just like an athlete.

2. What we need to weed-Out

a. An Uncontrolled Body

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV)

We need to subject our body to self-control. If we don't practise self control on our body, we will end up having an unhealthy life. Some people are addicted to drugs, some to alcohol, some to sex and pornography. They allow their flesh to overcome them so much so that lives gets trap in it. If we do not control our body's desires, we end up like the world as the world focuses upon fulfilling the desires of the flesh. However, it does not mean that we forsake entirely the pleasures but what God wants us is that it becomes a small part of lives. God should take the major part of lives instead of the pleasures of the world. Jesus said that as believers, we are in the world but we do not belong to it. Fasting is one way of bringing the flesh into subjection. Instead of focusing on the physical hunger, we channel and focus our hunger on God. By doing so, we learn how to bring our body to be under self-control.

Jesus showed us that He had self-control that despite a 40 day fasting, He did not give in to the devil's temptation to turn stone to bread. Joseph, son of Jacob, also showed that he had self control when he resisted the temptation of Potiphar's wife. Jesus tells us not to be dishearten for He has overcome the world (John 16:33) and we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37).

b. An Uncontrolled Spirit

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. (Pro 16:32 NKJV)

Self control is not just confined to the physical but also to our spiritual lives. The bible mentions that anger, envy and covetousness are part of an undisciplined spirit. It is interesting to note that a discipline spirit is greater than achieving something great as mentioned by Solomon in Proverbs 16:32. An undisciplined spirit also tends to have a mind of the world. The world tries to infiltrate our minds are filled with issues of the day, politics, work and worldly pleasures. The mind is a battle mind field. If someone has made you hurt you, you could allow your mind to keep on thinking about the incident and how you could settle the score or you forgive the person and move on. Proverbs 23:7, as man thinks in his heart, so is he! What fills our mind today? Is it God's Words or other matters?

Paul says in Philippians 4:8, "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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." If we squeeze an orange, we get orange juice. Naturally if a man is being squeeze (go through difficult times) you get what is stored within his mind and heart. So fill your mind with God's Word and things that will glorify God so that we may be able to glorify God in every way.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss what enables men of God like Joseph and Daniel in exercise self-control
2. What hinders us from achieving self control?
3. Discuss how we can help each other in achieving self-control

CONCLUSION

Self-control is an attribute of our Creator that Jesus exemplified in His life and that Paul strongly exhorts us to exercise in ours. If we are to be made in our Father's image, we will yield to God and allow God to work in us that we may have self-control and glorifying Him as we bear this fruit in Him. Amen.