

March 16, 2025

Being Fruitful

“Self-control”

Galatians 5:22-23

2 Peter 1:5-9

Intro:

A father was called to the police station in the middle of the night to make bail for his son who had been detained for drag racing. When the father arrived at the station, he pulled his son aside and began to question him about the incident. He just couldn't understand why his son would have been participating in such an activity.

“Well, Dad” the son replied, “I was there with the rest of the group and people were calling for people to have the courage to race. Well, at that moment it was like Satan was standing right in front of me encouraging me to do it. I knew it was a bad idea, but it was hard to resist. Then I remembered what the Pastor had said about Jesus and Peter, when Peter was telling Jesus he shouldn't be talking about his suffering and death at the hands of the religious leaders, and Jesus said, ‘Get behind me Satan!’. So that's what I did. I told Satan to get behind me.”

“If you did that, son, then how come you ended up being arrested for drag racing?” asked the father.

“Well, Satan did get behind me.... And he pushed me right into that car and that race.”

Self-control can be a tricky thing, because temptation can often blind or overpower our better judgement.

You're on a diet. As you pick up a magazine, you turn innocently to the food section. “After all,” you say to yourself, “pictures aren't fattening.” As you pore over every page, each dessert looks better than the last one. You decide to read in the kitchen because “the light is better.” After a few minutes, you begin thinking about the ice cream in the freezer. A model of restraint, you decide to

get only one spoonful – well, two at the most. Pretty soon you’ve eaten the whole tub!

Sound familiar? Maybe not those two exact scenarios, but I am sure we all can easily recall times where our desire for something overcomes our self-control and we find ourselves doing or saying something that we had determined not to do.

Something we need:

We have come, at last, to the end of the list of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul gives in Galatians 5. As we have worked through this sermon series, taking time to examine each aspect of the fruit, we have emphasized that each of these flows from the character of God, and is developed within us by the Holy Spirit. When we come to self-control, however, this rule no longer applies. God does not need to exercise self-control, for God can not be tempted. Yes, Jesus was tempted in the desert, but that was part of the fully human experience of his nature. He was the perfect sacrifice for humanity because he experienced and understood everything that humans do. Self-control is an issue for humans because there is within us the tendency for evil desires and evil actions. This is not a reality for God. **1 John 1:5** says this about God: “God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.”

Even though self-control over evil desires is not something God needs, it is something that we need. As the Holy Spirit works within us to develop godly character, developing self-control as Christians can be considered part of our being salt and light in the world. As we saw in the passage that we read from **2 Peter 1** just a few moments ago, self-control is something that we should be adding to the process of our growing faith.

Does this mean that we will always get it right and never succumb to temptation? No. Certainly we want to be striving towards fewer instances of giving in and sinning, but if we think that we will wake up one day and suddenly be free from messing up, we are only deceiving ourselves, and thus making ourselves more open to sin sliding back into our lives.

Examples:

It could be easy to think that being fruitful in the area of self-control is a losing battle. How often have you excused poor judgement with the phrase “I just wasn’t strong enough to resist”? It is not uncommon to hear the phrase “The Devil made me do it.” But are you doomed to be always ruled by temptation? Paul would argue no, because the Holy Spirit is at work within you. There is hope.

Two biblical examples of visible self-control are found in the life of Joseph and David. Joseph, while not the most tactful of fellows, had an encounter in Egypt that tested his self-control. He was a slave in Potiphar’s house. He had proven himself trustworthy, and so Potiphar had given him an elevated and trusted position. Then temptation came along in the form of sexual advances by Potiphar’s wife. Joseph was a good-looking guy, and she wanted to sleep with him. Joseph exercised great self-control by refusing and even fleeing from her (see **Genesis 39**). In that action, he demonstrated his commitment to Potiphar, and also to honoring God.

A second example, and this one also acts as a counter example to Joseph, is David. David sometimes struggled with self-control. He had moments of great control, such as the time he came upon Saul and his army sleeping while they were out looking for David to kill him. This is found in **1 Samuel 26**. David snuck into the camp at night and was presented with the opportunity (temptation) to kill Saul in his sleep. But he didn’t. Instead, he just took a spear and a bucket to prove he had been there and to show Saul how lucky he was and what level of mercy he had just received. One could argue that going into the camp in the first place shows a lack of self-control, but perhaps that was part of what God was doing in David’s life. David wasn’t always good at showing self-control, as is most famously seen by his actions concerning Bathsheba. I’m sure you are all familiar with that disaster.

Where Self-control is needed:

Just before we read about the fruit of the Spirit, Paul gives a non-exhaustive list of sinful behavior. **Galatians 5:19-21** says:

“¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”

The obvious lack of self-control sins are the sexual ones – immorality, impurity, and lustful pleasures. They are universal, but they are also the ones Christians work hard at gaining control over. It would be easy, then, for many Christians to tell themselves that they have overcome those temptations and therefore are good at self-control. But there is more to Paul’s list than sexual sins. What about hostility and quarreling? How about jealousy and outbursts of anger? Can we honestly say we have those all locked down tightly as well? Often, it is our tongue that gets us in the most trouble. How and what we communicate needs to be governed by self-control as much as anything else. If we are to hold to what James teaches in his letter, the tongue needs to be a priority in our efforts for self-control. And this isn’t just restricted to what we speak, but includes what we think and what we put down on paper or type in emails or online comments.

Conclusion:

So, even though self-control is something that we need to develop rather than part of the character of God being formed in us, we still need the Holy Spirit to form it in our lives. We need His help to find the strength to resist temptation and to temper our own sinful desires. This is a fruit that requires us to put our focus and energies into seeking a deeper and better understanding of God and our relationship with Him. It is when we let regular prayer, Bible reading, and worship slip that we will find ourselves sliding back towards sin.

Let me close this sermon, and the series, by sharing a few final words from Chris Wright:

“So Paul has come full circle in his portrayal of the fruit of the Spirit. He began with love, which is a quality that directs our thoughts and actions outward toward

others. And he ends with self-control, which is a quality that directs our thoughts and actions inward toward ourselves for our own good and that of others. And probably, Paul has in mind that unless we exercise this somewhat negative but necessary practice of self-control and live in a disciplined way (a way disciplined by the *Holy Spirit*), we will not be likely to bear the rest of the fruit of the Spirit.”¹

May we all be people who drink deeply of the Holy Spirit so that we may be fruitful in our lives of faith.

Let’s pray.

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of The Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 151.