

Sunday, September 3, 2017

Galatians 5:22-26

Romans 7:14-25

Romans 8:14-17

Spiritual Fruit of Self Control

It's Labour Day Sunday and so our focus today is on the Fruit of the Spirit mentioned at the end of Paul's list—self-control. We will also reflect upon why knowing about the fruit of the Spirit is helpful in our spiritual faith and what growing in the fruit of the Spirit helps us to do and understand. Throughout the summer we have been focusing on what Paul wrote to the Galatians about the acts of the flesh verses the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes these traits as relational characteristics which we each possess and which leads us to grow as individuals. The last one he mentions is self-control. What does it mean to have self-control?

Many of you might recall witnessing your children at age 11/2 to 21/2 years of age? These wonderful people are learning big lessons at this age and often talking clear words and sentences. One most often of course is no. No when asked to get ready for bathtime, or bed, or dressed or to eat. What is occurring is not only a testing of the parents' patience, but of asserting their ability to control their life often for the first or second or third time. At about this age of development they are learning about themselves as separate begins from their parents and so be asked to do something, the answer is often no. Usually this phase last but a short time, but we cannot be sure as God created everyone different! Self control is also something that we can show in private. When we know we need to take care of self. But it usually involves respecting the dignity of others and not infringing on their wellbeing.

But what is self-control? It involves moderation, constraint, and the ability to say "no" to our base desires and fleshly lusts. It is our choosing to live life as God intends; to be disciplined in what we do and say and to enable the Spirit to work in our lives. One of the proofs of God's working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions. IT is the choices we make because of our faith in Jesus. Sometimes these are conscious decisions and others the interest in a particular outlet is just not there. Why do you watch some programs on tv and not others? Some of us like educational programming; others like reality—but those who face difficult situations every day probably will not watch the same kinds of programs. It is about choices, but it is also what those sinful options are and whether one chooses to go against God's way.

We may sin by filling a legitimate need through illegitimate means and without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are incapable of knowing and choosing how best to meet our needs. Even

if we knew what would be best, such as doing something which will purposely harm us, the underlying need would be met. For example, why do people smoke, drink excessively, 'do drugs? What is it that they are seeking by turning to these vices? Often it is comfort or basic needs and lack of choices for change. Yet when given opportunities to share about their needs, self control returns because they are no longer focused on the act, but to seek change from within.

But why is self control so important? Where does it come in? Everywhere.

It takes self-control to show true godly *love* instead of lust and infatuation—to love others not as the world loves, but as Christ loved us. “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2, emphasis added throughout).

It takes self-control to have godly *joy* when we are facing a difficult situation in life. “Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

It takes self-control to get along with others and make *peace* instead of constantly getting into conflict. “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9).

It takes self-control to *patiently* bear with others rather than quickly condemning them. It's very hard to “be patient with all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

It takes self-control to not automatically look out only for yourself but *kindly* look out for other people (Philippians 2:4).

It takes self-control to do *good*, to go through the narrow gate toward life rather than the evil, wide gate toward destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

It takes self-control to be *faithful* and not have our faith shattered by the mocking of scoffers (2 Peter 3:3-4).

It takes self-control to be a *gentle* servant of the Lord (2 Timothy 2:24), showing compassion and mercy with real love as God does with us.

When we choose to follow Jesus we are freed from sin. As Romans 6:6 states, “Our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”. Through the Spirit we are given self-control and we can refuse sin.

Believers need self-control because the outside world and internal forces still attack and we must have defenses. A wall around an ancient city was designed to keep out the enemy. Judges at the gates determined who should be allowed in and who should remain outside. Soldiers and gates enforced those decisions. In our lives, these defenses might include avoiding

close relationships with sinners, meeting with other believers, and meditating on the life-giving Word of God. We don't exhibit self-control if we continually do what we did before we trusted and came to know Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Galatians because they asked questions about how to live the way Jesus wanted them to live. He wrote in Gal 5:25 "Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit." We live by the Spirit which is the power in the Christian life. And if we live by the Spirit then we are to follow the Spirit living consistently with Him. What does it mean to live this way? We align our will with the will of the Spirit and if we do we will want to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled.

We are to follow or keep in step with the Spirit and if we do, the Spirit will produce His fruit in us. If we don't we will remain immature believers who seek to live by the flesh rather than the spirit.

The Spirit won't zap us into mature godly believers like a microwave oven; no God likes us to cook slowly throughout our lives. But we must remain in his realm and follow him. Read the bible and learn from those who went before us about God's love and reaching out to others.

Those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. And as in Romans 8:17, if we are the children of God then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. While we might have times of suffering and hurting, there will also be much longer time glorifying him. So if we have the presence of the Spirit in our lives, we will have an amazing future—without sin, suffering butr sharing because we are God's children. As Christians we are in a relationship with God- the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit. Are we willing to freely live by God's Spirit? Then let us live by the Fruit of God's Spirt.

Let us pray

Wonderful God we praise you for you call us to you as we have sinned against you. Yet you hear our confessions and when we do confess, you are ready and willing to forgive. Help us to know that through the forgiveness of sins we are set free to live and love because of Jesus. Help us to live by your guiding hand, your Spirit which leads us to live fruitful lives for you have truly blessed us. Hear us as we pray in silence. AMEN.>