

Becoming Like Christ

Lesson 10: Self-Control: Mastering the Inner Life -- Galatians 5:22–24

In the old harbor towns there were men who tended the lighthouse, and their whole job was unglamorous and unseen. No crowd ever gathered to watch a man trim a wick or polish a lens. But on the night the storm came and the ships came feeling their way home through the dark, everything depended on whether that quiet, faithful work had been done. Self-control is like that. It is the least flashy of all the fruit of the Spirit, the one no one applauds, and yet it is the steady inner work on which so much of a Christian life either stands or is wrecked.

We live in a world that has nearly forgotten the word. We are taught to follow our hearts, to act on our feelings, to satisfy our appetites the moment they speak. Restraint sounds joyless, even repressive. And yet everyone who has ever lost their temper and wished they could take it back, everyone who has said the cutting word, clicked the thing they should not have clicked, eaten or drunk or spent past all good sense, knows in their bones that an ungoverned life is not a free life. It is a life dragged along by whatever happens to be loudest inside us at the moment.

Paul ends his great list of the fruit of the Spirit with this very quality. After love and joy and peace, after patience and kindness and goodness, after faithfulness and gentleness, he writes one more word: self-control. And then, as if to show us where it comes from, he adds, against such things there is no law, and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:23–24). The mastered inner life is not the achievement of an iron will alone. It is the harvest of a heart that belongs to Christ and walks by His Spirit in step with His Word.

So we come to one of the most practical and searching of all the lessons in this study. We will look at what self-control really is and what it is not, where the power for it comes from, and how the Spirit produces it in us as we walk by faith in obedience to the Scriptures. Read these verses slowly, and let them ask you the honest question: who, or what, is actually in charge of your inner life right now?

Group Discussion: Our culture often treats self-control as old-fashioned, even unhealthy, and prizes following our feelings and appetites instead. Why do you think the Bible places such high value on a governed inner life, and what damage do we see, in ourselves and around us, when self-control is missing? How is the biblical idea different from mere willpower or grim self-denial?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself about the one area where you feel least in control right now, whether it is your temper, your tongue, your appetites, your screen, your spending, or your private thoughts. What would it mean for Christ to begin reigning over

that exact corner of your life, and what is one place you have been unwilling to surrender to Him?

Read Galatians 5:22–24

Study Questions

1. Paul lists self-control as the final piece of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). What does it tell us about the Christian life that mastering our own inner appetites and impulses is part of the very character God forms in His people? How does this connect to the works of the flesh Paul has just named, which are largely a picture of a life with no inner government (Galatians 5:19–21)?
2. Self-control is rarely tested in the abstract; it is tested in a moment, the sharp reply ready on the tongue, the second helping, the thing you reach for when you are tired or wounded. Where do your own losses of control most often happen, and what tends to trigger them? What would it look like to invite Christ into that exact moment rather than only regretting it afterward?
3. Paul says self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit, not a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:22–23). Why does it matter that the Bible calls this a fruit, something grown, rather than simply a discipline we manufacture by gritting our teeth? At the same time, why does calling it fruit not make us passive (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, where Paul disciplines his own body)?
4. Many of us try to control the outward behavior while leaving the inner desire untouched, like cutting the weed off at the ground while the root lives on. Where have you been managing symptoms rather than letting Christ deal with the root? What desire underneath the behavior most needs to be brought honestly to Him this week?

5. Right after naming self-control, Paul writes that those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). What does it mean that the flesh has already been crucified, and how does that decisive break with our old life become the foundation for the daily, ongoing battle for self-control?
6. Crucifixion is not a single past event we coast on; Paul also says we must keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), and Jesus speaks of taking up the cross daily (Luke 9:23). In which area of your life do you most need to take up the cross again today, deliberately saying no to a desire that wars against your walk with Christ? What concrete step would that involve?
7. Self-control is often the guardian of all the other fruit; without it, love grows impatient, peace gives way to outburst, and gentleness hardens into harshness. How do you see self-control protecting and serving the other graces in Paul's list (Galatians 5:22–23)? Why might it be no accident that Paul places it last, as if to hold the rest together?
8. Scripture connects self-control to hope and to the return of Christ, telling us to live self-controlled lives as we wait for the blessed hope (Titus 2:11–13; 1 Peter 4:7; 5:8). How does keeping eternity and Christ's coming in view change the way you handle your appetites and impulses now? Where would remembering that you belong to Christ steady you in a struggle you face?
9. Some teach that the fruit of the Spirit, including self-control, is poured into the believer by a direct, miraculous operation of the Spirit working on the heart apart from the Word, so that growth is something done to a passive Christian rather than produced as we actively walk by the Spirit. Yet Paul calls us to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25), commands us to make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14), and the Word is the Spirit's instrument by which He equips us for

every good work (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). How does the Bible teach that the Spirit actually produces self-control in us, and why does this matter for how we pursue a mastered inner life?

10. Look back across Galatians 5:22–24 as a whole: self-control as the fruit of the Spirit, grown in those who belong to Christ and have crucified the flesh, who now walk by the Spirit. Name one specific area of your inner life where you most sense Jesus wanting to take the throne through this study, and one concrete habit of walking with Him, in His Word and in prayer, that you will begin this week to cooperate with His work in you.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 25:28, a person without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, Paul disciplines his body so as not to be disqualified; Titus 2:11–13, grace trains us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives as we await Christ; 1 Peter 5:8, be sober-minded and watchful, for the adversary prowls; 2 Peter 1:5–8, supplement your faith with self-control on the way to love.