

CONFRONTING LACK OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND SELF-CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

- Self-control and self-discipline are crucial to living a God-honoring, Spirit-led life
- Both are essential to not only godly living but also to accomplishing much of anything in life as this virtue (or vice) spills over into many other areas of life...we cannot pick and choose the areas of life in which we will exercise self-control
- In fact, a lack of self-control/self-discipline opens the door to a variety of other sins....when we seldom say “no” to our desires and emotions, we become more vulnerable to associated sins
- Thus, a lack of self-control may be one of the more “secret sins” believers struggle with

What is self-control? It is a governance or prudent control of one’s desires, cravings, impulses, emotions, and passions. It is saying no when we should say no. It is moderation in legitimate desires and activities, and absolute restraint in areas that are clearly sinful.

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 110.

Biblical self-control...covers every area of life and requires an unceasing conflict with the passions of the flesh that wage war against our souls (see 1 Peter 2:11). This self-control is dependent on the influence and enablement of the Holy Spirit. It requires continual exposure of our mind to the words of God and continual prayer for the Holy Spirit to give us both the desire and power to exercise self-control. We might say that self-control is not control *by* oneself through one’s own willpower but rather control *of* oneself through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 111.

- Typically, self-discipline and self-control carry with it a negative connotation...something we rely on to complete our most difficult or least favorite tasks
- But, self-discipline and self-control should be seen positively...as something that promotes joy...in much the same way as a train is only free when it is confined to the railroad tracks

In general, we discipline ourselves to avoid the negative consequences of a lack of discipline. We know that we will suffer if we don’t exercise, if we don’t manage our finances, if we never crawl out of bed. If these things were pleasant, they wouldn’t require so much effort, right? We don’t need discipline to eat chocolate but to not eat chocolate. Discipline is associated with self-denial and it is not surprising, then, that it tends to have negative connotations. But sometimes it really just comes down to how we frame it, because discipline is equally important when it comes to life’s pleasant tasks. We don’t just need to discipline ourselves away from unpleasantness but toward joy. Discipline allows us to picture desirable outcomes, to form a plan to get there, to take the necessary steps, and to experience the joys we long for. Discipline is good because discipline delivers joy...When we associate discipline only with avoidance of negative outcomes we rob ourselves of a means God uses to promote our joy and ultimately our joy in him.

Tim Challies, http://www.challies.com/articles/the-joy-of-self-discipline?utm_content=bufferd63e0&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

BIBLICAL SUPPORT

Proverbs 16:32 ~ He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

- Being able to “rule your spirit” brings great blessings!

Proverbs 25:28 ~ *Like a city that is broken into and without walls* Is a man who has no control over his spirit.

- In biblical times, a city defended itself primarily by its walls – if its walls were breached the enemies would pour into the city and conquer it
- Solomon likens the person without self-control to the city without walls – they are vulnerable to various temptations
- Unfortunately, Solomon himself became one of the greatest examples of this – he let his passions run out of control in gathering 700 wives and 300 concubines...a poor choice that ultimately led his heart away from God and resulted in the kingdom being divided under his son Rehoboam

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ~ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- Paul illustrates through athletic imagery the importance of training and disciplining himself through self-control to keep himself from becoming disqualified from the work of the ministry

Galatians 5:22-23 ~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**; against such things there is no law.

- Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit; thus, it gives evidence in a believer’s life that they are walking in the Spirit rather than by the flesh

Philippians 3:12-14 ~ Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- Paul uses the analogy of a sprinter with his muscles straining and his sights set on the finish line to illustrate the self-discipline necessary for living the Christian life
- He is describing the aggressive, energetic action necessary for reaching the goal of Christlikeness

2 Timothy 3:1-3 ~ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, **without self-control**, brutal, haters of good...

- A lack of self-control is a characteristic of those in the last days

Titus 2:2, 5, 6 ~ Older men are to be temperate, dignified, **sensible**, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance...[younger women are] *to be sensible*, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored...Likewise urge the young men to be **sensible**

- Being “sensible” or “self-controlled” should be the mark of godly men and women in the church

Titus 2:11-12 ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live **sensibly**, righteously and godly in the present age.

- The same grace that brings salvation also trains us to live self-controlled lives

Hebrews 12:1-2 ~ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...

- The writer of Hebrews uses the imagery of a runner running the race as an illustration of self-discipline

1 Peter 1:13 ~ Therefore, prepare your minds for action, **keep sober** *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ

- Sober mindedness in the Bible has to do with understanding priorities and thinking about things you ought to think about
- A disciplined mind is a mind that avoids the intoxicating elements and allurements of the world
- The self-controlled, self-disciplined, sober-minded person is somebody whose mind is clear, whose priorities are fixed, who has a spiritual steadfastness, who exercises self-control in their thinking, and who has balanced priorities

1 Peter 5:8 ~ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

- Peter exhorts us to essentially pull in all the loose ends in our thinking so that we are spiritually watchful and living by principles and priorities

2 Peter 1:5-6 ~ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, and in *your* knowledge, **self-control**, and in *your* **self-control**, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness

- Peter exhorts believers to a life of “self-control”...to literally “hold oneself in”
- Just like an athlete who disciplines their body and puts it through the rigors of training in order to be most competitive, so too a Christian is to control the flesh, the passions, and the bodily desires rather than allowing themselves to be controlled by them

SOME AREAS TO CULTIVATE SELF DISCIPLINE

- Though self-control needs to be exercised in every area of life, the following are some ways that believers might fail to demonstrate it:

Eating and Drinking

- The issue here is not how much a person weighs as there are some people who don't gain weight but do fail to exercise self-control in their eating and drinking
- Certainly, God has given us all good things to enjoy:

1 Timothy 4:3 ~ *men* who forbid marriage *and* advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth

- The important issue here is making sure that we avoid the tendency to indulge our desires so that they control us, instead of us controlling those desires

Anger and Temper

Proverbs 14:17 ~ A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.

Proverbs 15:18 ~ A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger calms a dispute.

Proverbs 29:22 ~ An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression

James 1:19-20 ~ *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God

- Believers who are known to be hot-tempered or to have a short fuse demonstrate that they not only have an anger problem, but they commit the added sin of a lack of self-control
- A person who easily flies off the handle in anger or tends to become easily irritable is one who exercises little or no control over their emotions
- Such displays of anger should not characterize the believer who is to be self-controlled and sober-minded

Finances

- Average American Household Debt: **\$5,700**. Average for balance-carrying households: **\$16,048**
 - Total Outstanding U.S. Consumer Debt: **\$3.4 trillion**. Total revolving debt: **\$929 billion**
 - **38.1% of all households** carry some sort of credit card debt.
 - Households with the lowest net worth (zero or negative) hold an average of **\$10,308** in credit card debt.
 - The Northeast and West Coast hold the highest average credit card debt – both averaging over **\$8,000**.
- <http://www.valuepenguin.com/average-credit-card-debt>

- These statistics show that Americans are spending beyond their means
- The fact that there are several Christians ministries dedicated to the purpose of helping Christians get out of debt indicates that this is not just a secular problem
- Many people, including Christians, are indulging in whatever their heart desires, whether they can afford it or not
- Believers must live within their God-ordained means and commit to investing in eternity

Matthew 6:19-20 ~ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

A Radical Mortifying of Sin in General

Matthew 5:29-30 ~ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

- Rather than going soft on sin and catering to it, believers must do war with sin, mortifying the flesh which wages war against us (1 Pet 2:11) and considering themselves dead to sin (Col 3:5)

Other Areas

- Inordinate time surfing the Internet? Excessive TV/movie watching, video game playing? Engaging in hobbies? Playing/watching sports? Impulse buying?

PRACTICAL STEPS TO DEVELOPING SELF-DISCIPLINE¹

1. **Start Small** – Learn to discipline yourself in the little things of life because it is the little things of life that make for the big successes.
2. **Clean your environment** – Get rid of all that stuff...clean your desk, your room, your house, your garage. Just become discontent with a mess in general. Get yourself to the place where orderliness matters. Learn how to get rid of the excess, learn how to trim down, learn how to keep your environment clean and clear so that you can function without a myriad of distractions and so that you've made decisions and selections about what matters and what doesn't matter.
3. **Organize your life** - Plan the use of your time; don't just react to circumstances. Use a calendar and make a daily list of things you need to accomplish. Establish time frames in which they need to be done and learn to train yourself to keep that schedule.If you don't control your time, everything else will.
4. **Be on time** - That may not seem very spiritual, but it's important. If you're supposed to be somewhere at a specific time, be there on time. Develop the ability to discipline your desires, activities, and demands so that you can arrive on time, even in the small, seemingly insignificant things, because it says a lot about how your life is ordered. Being able to order yourself such that you can get where you need to be on time speaks volumes to people you are supposed to meet with about how important it is for you to be with them. And remember, on time is early!
5. **Keep your word** - If you say you're going to do it, then do it and do it when you're going to do it and do it the way you said you'd do it because your word is so important. Don't make promises you can't keep. Make commitments and see them through. If you learn to keep your word in the small things, then you'll begin to keep your word in the big things.
6. **Do the hardest job first** - When you do that, you will find it easier to do the simpler tasks.Most people work on the reverse...and when they run out of time and energy, then they have an excuse not to do what they should have done first because it was most difficult and probably most important. So save the easiest thing for last.
7. **Finish what you start** – Commit to completing one task in its entirety before moving on to another task.
8. **Practice self-denial** - Learn to say no to your feelings. Learn to do what you know to be right even if you don't feel like doing it. Sometimes it's even beneficial to deny yourself things that are acceptable to have, like a doughnut in the morning or dessert after dinner. Exercising such self-restraint helps you develop the habit of keeping other things under control. Cultivating discipline in the physical realm will help you become disciplined in your spiritual life.
9. **Welcome responsibility** - When you have an opportunity to do something that needs to be done, volunteer for it if you have talent in that area. Accepting responsibility can force you to organize yourself.
10. **Wean yourself off entertainment** – This teaches you to view entertainment as something arbitrary...something you can take or leave. Get yourself to the place where you if you have excess time do things that are productive rather than sit and be entertained. Entertainment makes a very, very small contribution to your well-being and to your success.

¹ Adapted from <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/A138/developing-selfdiscipline?Term=self%20discipline> and <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-130/fundamental-christian-attitudes-selfdiscipline-part-1?Term=self%20discipline>