

April 28, 2021 | Wholly Living

Week 10 | Gal. 5:22-26 | Self-Control

When the God of the universe takes up residence in a person's heart, some significant/obvious/undeniable changes will occur. Paul called these changes the 'Fruit of the Spirit.

READ: Galatians 5:22-26 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Now, as I've said each week in this study, we cannot cultivate nor can we produce these virtues on our own. Paul is insistent that each of these divine attributes *already* indwells the believer as they keep "in step" with the Spirit. They do not need to be worked on; instead, they need to be discovered.

In week 2, we tackled the first attribute of the Spirit: love. Love is that place from which all of the other graces flow. Without love, there are no fruits of the Spirit.

In week 3, we studied joy. Joy cannot exist without grace. The believer has joy and can rejoice precisely because they do not have to earn their way into God's good graces. God's graces are freely offered, and this truth, in turn, makes our hearts glad.

In week 4, Bob was kind enough to tackle peace. And as he eloquently pointed out, "No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace."

In week 5, we dove into the concept of patience. Patience is simply the capacity to accept delay without losing one's temper; or, as one commentator put it, patience is "waiting with the *right* attitude."¹

In week 6, we looked at the word kindness. More than any other, the Christian ought to be kind because we, more than any other, have been shown the kindness of God.

¹ Guthrie, George E., *James*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, editors Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2006), p. 266.

In week 7, we dove into what Paul called “goodness.” Like a painter, Paul not only drew fine lines and added intricate details to his canvas when he painted the fruits of the Spirit, he also used a wide brush with broad strokes to fill in the majority of the landscape and define the outer edges of his work. Generally speaking, all that the Spirit does is good.

In week 8, we tackled a much more specific word, “faithfulness,” which relates to fidelity, dependability, and reliability. Those who have the Spirit dwelling within will likewise be individuals who are tried and true.

Last week, we looked at the word “gentleness.” It's translated in a variety of ways: considerateness, meekness, humility, and mildness. Those who have the gentle Spirit will themselves possess a gentle spirit.

Today, as we close our series, let's talk about self-control. The Greek word Paul uses here is **ἐγκράτεια** (eg-kra-tay-ah). It's a rare word in the NT, but the close cognates show that this word means “restraint,” “temperance,” and “frugality.” In short, to control one's self is to curb the desires within.

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With few exceptions, self-control stands as the starkest contrast to the vices of the flesh (i.e., sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies). Thus, it's quite possible out of all the other virtues of the Spirit, the Galatians lacked self-control the most.² What's more, self-control is such a broad term that it seemingly acts much like a summation characteristic of all that's come before.³

Interestingly, in the Greco-Roman world, self-restraint was highly prized. Famous philosophers like Isocrates, Socrates, and Aristotle all encouraged their followers to practice some form of temperance in the daily lives. Everything from restraint in eating, drinking, intercourse, sleep, and even work was encouraged. Even the famed philosopher/mathematician Pythagoras would test would-be disciples by grilling them on what it meant to control themselves.⁴ To restrain one's desires was a mark of true power and maturity. Thus, the story goes that someone asked

² Keener, Craig S., *Galatians: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2019), p. 523.

³ George, Timothy, *Galatians*, Christian Standard Commentary, (Holman Reference, 2020), p. 451.

⁴ Keener, Craig S., *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 24:1-28:31, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2015), 4:3434.

the Greek philosopher Plato, “What man is most fit to govern a town” To which Plato replied, “He that can well govern himself.”

While it is hard to argue with many such philosophers, the critical defect in their idea of self-control is that the self should be controlled by the self. But this is no more possible than expecting a child to raise itself. Only through guidance can one truly learn to control the self. Therefore, while the Christian can undoubtedly control themselves in some things like the nonchristian, it is only through the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit that the Christian can manage themselves in all things. It is for this reason that, when compared to Greek philosophers and orators during Paul’s day, you’ll find only a smattering of passages regarding restraint in the NT. And when it is brought up, it is never spoken of as a lone virtue to be realized but a characteristic of the living God living out this virtue for the believer (i.e., Ac. 24:25; 1 Cor. 7:9, 9:25; Gal. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:6; for “sober” see also Mar. 5:15; Lu. 8:35; Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 5:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 2:2, 5, 6; 1 Pet. 4:7). Why? Because God knows that apart from the Spirit’s control, self-control is unachievable.

Only through the power of God can the heart of man be reigned in. Even the Psalmist knew this.

READ: Psalm 141:3-4 (ESV)

³ Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. ⁴ Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies.

In fact, the control of self is evidence of the last age prophesied by Ezekiel.

READ: Ezekiel 36:22, 25-27 (ESV)

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel...²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Today, this prophecy is fulfilled. Everyone who has believed in Jesus has the Spirit of God living in them. The Christian is no longer self-controlled as if such a thing was even possible but Spirit-controlled.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Restraining oneself is only possible for the Spirit-controlled.

READ: Galatians 5:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Yield yourself to the Spirit, and you will control the self. But yield yourself to your own desires, and you will become a slave of your own passions.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the metaphor of a boxer and runner to explain that for every believer who wishes to experience success in their Christian walk, they must have self-control.

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run [like one who runs] aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself [will not] be disqualified.

Paul preached a message of self-control. But he ensured that he was also temperate and restrained in all things so that his preaching would not be hypocritical.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Restraining oneself self is only possible for the Spirit-controlled.

A nonbeliever can show some restraint in some things. But only the believer can show self-control in all things.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Wholly Living | Week 10

TITLE: Self-control

TEXT: Galatians 5:22-26

Yield yourself to the Spirit, and you will control the self. But yield yourself to your own desires, and you will become a slave of your own passions. A nonbeliever can show some restraint in some things. But only the believer can show self-control in all things. Restraining oneself is only possible for the Spirit-controlled.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: