

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF – WEEK #11
The Fruit of the Spirit is SELF-CONTROL part 2)
1 Corinthians 9:23–27

PATTI

Two weeks ago we gave an overview of the last spiritual fruit listed in Galatians 5 – the fruit of self-control. But tonight we want to get practical, because a lot of us have made New Year’s resolutions again. And a lot of us also know that our resolutions usually aren’t enough.

St. Paul said the same power is at work in you that raised Jesus from the dead! Think of that... When Jesus gets power over you and puts his power into you, even in this trying time of pandemic - the result is self-control.

We see this in Mark 5, when His power comes into a demon-possessed man. And the townspeople are incredulous. Because this crazy, homeless guy, who ran around naked, screaming and hurting himself for years, is sitting there at Jesus’ feet, clothed and in his right mind.

Even those of us who look fairly polished on the outside are often just as out of control as the demoniac on the inside - just as desperate for the change that only Jesus can bring.

Tonight we’re going to look at 4 bible passages. You can look them up as we go, or just listen and come back to them later, since they’re listed in the attachment.

Let’s look, first of all, at **the PROBLEM of self-control** in Ephesians 2:1–3.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among

them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

That word “desires” means something like, “**commands of the flesh.**”

The flesh is the compulsion we have to want to be the center of

the universe – to make our own decisions about what’s right and wrong.

It’s deciding that you want to be your own boss, live for your own happiness.

Instead of submitting to God’s will and living for His glory and letting Him decide what is right and wrong, you assign yourself that divine role.

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The word “flesh”, in the Bible, doesn’t usually mean the body, at least not when it’s talking about flesh versus spirit. **The flesh is the bent of the whole person to be God rather than to be under God.**

This bent first happens in Genesis 3 when the serpent comes to Adam and Eve and says, **“If you eat of this fruit, you will be as God, knowing good from evil.”** This was the first temptation – To be in a position to decide for yourself what’s right and wrong, and therefore to be as God. Our spirits are bent by that.

But as a Christian, you also have the Spirit of God, the fire of God who heats up that bent section of your spirit like an expert welder wielding a torch... and over time, be bent part of your nature softens so that it can be made straight again. Christians call this process sanctification.

Secondly, the flesh teaches us not only to be in control of our lives be being our own gods, but also to worship other things.

Your flesh tells you there are certain things you must have in order to matter or to be okay. And believing that leads to compulsive behavior.

Whatever controls us is effectively our Lord.

If you live for power, you’ll be controlled by power.

If you live for the approval of others, you’ll be controlled by the need to please them.

We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life. If Jesus is the Lord, he is the one who controls. He has the ultimate power. Either Jesus is the one in control, or you are addicted to something else. Either Jesus is in control of your life or you are being mastered by your compulsions.

You may be addicted to a certain emotion or person, a particular substance or a behavior. What makes a person either too in love with their work or too afraid of work? What makes a person need physical pleasure? What makes a person become driven by appearance or achievement or time or career? Paul says it's the flesh.

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Romans 10:3-4 says, "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Because the flesh seeks to be its own god, it follows that people will seek their own righteousness, and in the process we become addicted to the path. In other words, the flesh creates compulsive behavior, and the only way out from under the flesh is the gospel.

The flesh tells you, "You can't fail at this. This job, this relationship, this project, this opportunity." Because that's your righteousness, and you're nothing without it.

But by His death and resurrection Jesus abolished the treadmills on which people tend to seek their own righteousness. In Him, you already have acceptance, worth, and belonging. **Christ is the end of the law so that**

By contrast, the flesh gets you to make covenants with false gods, who curse you when you fail.

In unbelievers, the flesh has total dominion. It says, in Romans 6, **“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that that body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ... For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”** (Romans 6:6, 14)

Unlike non-believers, Christians are no longer under dominion of sin. Because while we are still influenced by sin, we are by no means under its absolute rule.

Most un-believers don't know they're being ruled or dominated. If you've been brainwashed, you don't even know enough to rebel. But as soon as a person starts to say, **“Sin is controlling me. My pride or self-centeredness is controlling me ...”** As soon as you realize that, It's no longer absolutely controlling you. You can resist because you know what's going on.

David often says in the Psalms, **“My sins have overtaken me,”** but he never says, **“My sins have taken me over.”** Sin can knock you around and get you in a lot of trouble, as it did King David, but as long as you know you're in trouble, you're not under its dominion.

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C.S. said only Christians know they're proud. Because if you say, **“I am not proud,”** you're under the dominion of pride. But when you admit, **“I have a problem with pride,”** then that moment, you've lost some of it, and pride is no longer controlling everything. It's not your master; Jesus is.

First Corinthians 10:13 says,

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”
So there's always a way out, but there's also a dilemma...

Yet in Romans 7, Paul says, **“Very often, when I most want to do the right thing, evil lies close at hand. In my inmost self I delight in the law of God, but there is another**

principle at work in my members, making war against the law of my mind, bringing me captive, and sometimes I do the very thing I hate.”

Deep in Paul’s heart, he love’s God’s Word, but there’s still a lot of guerrilla warfare going on. He drove the enemy out of headquarters, but they’re still out there in the jungle and they’re constantly taking potshots, because they know they’ve lost the battle and they’re angry

That’s the struggle we all have. As long as the flesh is in total control, it’s happy. But once you recognize it for what it is, and begin to push back, the more stirred up and resistant it becomes.

So while the flesh can’t ultimately defeat those who belong to God, in the short term, it can cause us heartache. But we can resist.

Someone has said that pastors really only do two things: 1) try to convince people who are under the dominion of sin, who think they’re not, that they really are, and 2) telling people not under the dominion of sin, who think they are, that they’re really not.

As we’ve said, the counterfeit solution to the problem of self-control is willpower. Willpower works temporarily, but in the end, it leaves you worse off. But in the Gospels, Jesus claims that anywhere he comes into power over somebody, demonic influences are banished.

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Demonic influence happens through the flesh.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Don’t be bitter. Don’t be resentful.” Then he adds, “don’t give the Devil a foothold.”

Think of the Devil as mountain climber. He’s trying to conquer your soul. And the desires of the flesh are the only footholds he has. Anger, pride, jealousy, lust, gluttony, strife are the footholds.

To deal with evil, you have to identify these footholds and then zap them with the gospel, because only the gospel can shrink them.

When you forget that you're saved by grace, the flesh will develop your compulsive behavior again, and now the devil has a foothold.

But the deliverance Jesus gives from evil is not just moral reformation. Moral reformation means you clean up your life.

In one story that Jesus tells, a demon is thrown out from a man. But the man does not put any supernatural power, let alone Jesus, in its place. So when the spirit comes back later, there's nothing in the man to oppose or defeat it.

Some people actually try to avoid Jesus by avoiding sin. They become perfectionistic about clean living, so they can look down their noses at others. And they become so self-righteous in their own minds that they never have to depend on Jesus' mercy.

There's an awful lot of moral reformation that doesn't have Jesus at the heart. It's willpower, but it's a kind of willpower that actually keeps Jesus away and puts you more deeply locked into the grip of the flesh.

Self-control is not something you do for yourself. It only comes when we want something more than the self. And this is where we come to the text that we read at the beginning of our time tonight...

JEFF

1 Corinthians 9:23–27

"23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." (in other words, self-control).

“They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a **crown** that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for **the prize.**”

We said last week that the first step to self-control is....

choosing the important thing over the urgent thing.

The important thing is always to please God and give him joy.

The urgent thing is to please yourself and to seek joy apart from God.

When Paul imagines the priority of pleasing, God, he pictures a crown and a prize, which symbolize eternal rewards.

We are visual people, and imagination is the thing that enables us to take an abstract truth and make it vivid.

A picture is worth 1,000 words, right? Video is much more powerful than audio alone. I may have an voice in my head that says, “I’m going to get in shape this year”.

But then I drive past Dairy Queen and there’s a 4 foot tall picture of an ice cream Sunday, next to some fries and a double cheeseburger. Which do you think will win out?

Unless I can picture how great I’m going to look when the ball drops on 2022, it’s likely that DQ will prevail.

On a more serious note, Paul understands sexual temptation.

That’s when you have on video in your head how good that person looks who’s not your spouse and how lonely you are and how great it would be to go to bed with them.

Increasingly, millions of actual videos of people who aren’t your spouse are just a click away on the internet. And to combat all of that your brain has only a simple audio that says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”

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What Paul knows is that this won’t be enough. You need more. You need a compelling

video. Which is why in his first letter to the Corinthian Church, where sexual immorality was rampant among even the believers, he gave them one when he said in chapter 6, v. 19-20 - **“You are not your own; you were bought with a price.”**

That’s an image that’ll stick with you. Jesus on the cross. Can you picture the price that Jesus paid for you in terms of his pierced hands and bloodstained brow?

In John 2, Jesus comes into the temple, which is God’s house, his Father’s dwelling place. He looks at the money-changers and throws them out. Why? His zeal for the purity of his Father’s house consumed him!

His zeal for the purity of our lives consumes him, too.
Christ lives in you and me. He sees everything we think and do.
The bible tells us that His pure eyes can’t behold iniquity, but what then are we showing Him?

When you say, “I am not my own, I was bought with a price,” you’re preaching to yourself. You’re reminding yourself about what is worth pursuing by envisioning the prize.

But the reason many Christians can’t seem quickly gain self-control or snap out of an emotion like anger, is because they don’t know the Word of God well enough. At least not well enough to use His promises against the evil one at a moment’s notice.

For that you need regular study. You need to write things down and carry them with you. and enlist friends who can help.

When the Caesars used to ride into Rome at the end of a great conquest, they would hire a slave to sit on Caesar’s chariot, and as the Caesar was coming in, and everybody was saying, “Hail Caesar! Hail Caesar,” the slave’s job was to whisper, “Remember, you’re mortal. You’re going to die.” Over and over again.

Do you have anybody like that who can tell you the truth? **Exhort one another daily, lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** Are you willing to let somebody or several somebodies in that far? Do you have good Christian friends who you allow to

come in close enough to see your sin, where your flesh is operating? Are they able to bring the Word of God to bear on you?

Unless you make yourself accountable to other people, and learn to identify the particular way or ways that the flesh drives you, it will always be an uphill battle; on that I often feel I would be losing without the 5 people in my own life who love me enough to get after me when I need it.

Next week we're going to look at the nitty-gritty of temptation; how it happens, what the stages are, some examples of it, and how we can have victory over it. And then, we're going to take a break from the particular teaching time for a while...

PRAYER:

Father, thank you for Jesus, who is the end of the law and the One who is ultimately important, whom we seek to please. Empower us to keep His Word and cross before us always, so that we can live, not by the desires or commands of the flesh, but by the Spirit. In Jesus' name.