

10. The Fruit of the Spirit is Self-Control (1Q 2010—The Fruit of the Spirit)

Biblical material: Judges 13–16; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1–10; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:15, 16.

Quotes

- So often, he who is impatient to become his own master, when the outward checks are removed, merely becomes his own slave. *Anon.*
- There must be love, but love in its most practical forms: commitment to each other, sharing together, self-discipline, and some self-sacrifice. *Princess Diana*
- Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control. These three alone lead to sovereign power. *Lord Tennyson*
- Being out of control is one of the worst feelings in the world, sometimes even worse than pain. It is its own kind of pain. *Danzae Pace*
- You must admit you have self-control before you can use it. *Carrie Latet*
- I am indeed a king, because I know how to rule myself. *Pietro Aretino*
- If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins. *Benjamin Franklin*
- It's all right letting yourself go, as long as you can get yourself back. *Mick Jagger*

Questions

Why is it so important to have self-control? What do we say when we allow our temper to dictate our actions? How is self truly controlled? What is the role of the Spirit in this? When we lose control, are we truly thinking? Do we have any examples of God losing control, of “getting mad”? How does irrational behavior fit with a Christian life?

Bible discussion

The first text given for study is the story of Samson in Judges 13-16. While it's recorded that Samson was filled with the Spirit, would you say he was a great example of self-control? Paul talks about disciplining his body in 1 Cor. 9:24–27—what is the Spirit's role in this? Using the imagery of training for sports, Paul makes it clear that we need to have this as a focus—how does this work in our spiritual life? In Phil. 4:8 Paul tells us to fix our minds on good things—as a way of developing self-control. Certainly the avoidance of bad stimuli would be important in making sure we stay in control—unlike the former smoker I knew who kept a packet of cigarettes at home to prove he had developed self-control! Similarly Col. 3:1-10 tells us to stay away from all the things we used to do which led us to sin. We need to “strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up.” (Heb. 12:1 NLT). In this way we demonstrate we don't love the things of this world (1 John 2:15, 16).

Comment

Self-control is another fruit of the Spirit we frequently fail to ask for. It's as if the last thing we want to have is any kind of restriction on our freedom to think and act as we choose—yet we're aware that we do at times lose control with all that then happens. So surely we should be praying for self-control—the ability to always keep ourselves under the control of our thinking mind, not to lash out unpredictably or irrationally.

Of course, if our “self” follows the ideas of the Enemy then even if we do have self-control, we will be acting against God, so we need to carefully consider what our “self” really wants! But it remains true that an emotive, even violent, response to situations where we just allow our sinful nature to burst forth is not representative of God or the Spirit we claim to have.

The Greek word for self-control literally means “inner strength,” and this is perhaps an even better idea of what the Spirit does. It makes us strong internally, able to fight in God’s power against the temptations that come to us. It “signifies the free, autonomous, and independent person, who does not allow himself to be tempted or diverted by any allurements.” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament).

So Peter concludes, “In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.” (2 Peter 1:5-7 NLT). This indicates a deliberate choice on our part to be this kind of people—it doesn’t happen accidentally. Though “by beholding we become changed” we do need to choose to look, and want to be changed!

This is the continuing theme: “So think clearly and exercise self-control.” (1 Peter 1:13 NLT). Self-control and clear thinking go together, just as lack of control and irrational thinking/acting go together. We need to make sure we do think clearly—and that means doing all we can to avoid damaging our thinking equipment. The Deceiver knows that the best way to attack is to destroy our ability to think and to choose—and uses all kinds of poisons—physical, mental, and spiritual—to do just that.

Ellen White Comments

Those who are placed in authority should constantly cultivate self-control. I am thankful that God is a wise ruler, and every one who is a true disciple of Christ will be humble, lift his cross, and meekly follow where the self-denying, self-sacrificing Jesus leads the way. {RH, July 26, 1892}

In giving us the privilege of studying His Word, the Lord has set before us a rich banquet. Many are the benefits derived from feasting on His Word, which is represented by Him as His flesh and blood, His spirit and life. By partaking of this Word, our spiritual strength is increased; we grow in grace and in a knowledge of the truth. Habits of self-control are formed and strengthened. The infirmities of childhood—fretfulness, willfulness, selfishness, hasty words, passionate acts—disappear, and in their place are developed the graces of Christian manhood and womanhood. {CG 505-6}

Look unto Jesus at all times and in all places, offering a silent prayer from a sincere heart that you may know how to do His will. Then when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard for you against the enemy. When you are almost ready to yield, to lose patience and self-control, to be hard and denunciatory, to find fault and accuse—this is the time for you to send to heaven the prayer, “Help me, O God, to resist temptation, to put all bitterness and wrath and evil-speaking out of my heart. Give me Thy meekness, Thy lowliness, Thy long-suffering, and Thy love... {AH 214}