

Self-Control



Fruit of the Spirit (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today.

I've been sharing with you about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In my talk yesterday, I dealt with the fruit of gentleness or meekness. Today I'm going to speak about the last remaining form of spiritual fruit, the fruit of self-control. This is the translation given in most of the modern versions. In the King James Version, the word used is temperance. The problem with the word "temperance" is that over 350 years or more it has somewhat changed its associations. In contemporary English today, the word "temperance" is often associated only with abstinence from alcohol. However, the Greek word includes abstinence in every area of our lives. It not merely prohibits excessive indulgence in alcohol but just as much excessive indulgence in food; that is, gluttony or overeating.

I heard somebody say once about our contemporary American culture, "After an American has worn out one set of teeth digging an untimely grave for himself, he gets an artificial set to finish off the job." I would say that gluttony is probably one of the most commonly tolerated sins among American Christians. Most American churches, or many at least, are dead set against alcohol and drunkenness but say nothing whatever against gluttony or over-eating. And when we see the members of those churches, their physical condition makes it pretty obvious that they haven't viewed that as a sin. However, the Bible normally puts drunkenness and gluttony very close together and condemns each equally.

For instance, here's an instance in Deuteronomy 21:18–21 about how parents, under the law, were to treat a stubborn and rebellious son.

> "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of our is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear."

(NAS)

Notice the charge against the son. He is stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard. Four things are put together: stubbornness, rebelliousness, gluttony and drunkenness. The first two, that's stubbornness and rebelliousness, are aspects of character and are causes. The last two, that's gluttony and drunkenness, are aspects of conduct and are results. We need to understand that both gluttony and drunkenness and almost all forms of overindulgence and addiction go back to two roots in our character: stubbornness and rebelliousness.

Now, under the law of Moses the penalty for both gluttony and drunkenness when they expressed stubbornness and rebelliousness was death. That's God's evaluation of those two forms of conduct. So we're not going to use the word "temperance" today, but we're going to use the word "self-control" because of its much wider associations.

Now, many Christians are surprised to learn that God expects us to control ourselves. When we confront them with that kind of teaching they answer something like this, "Well, I thought the Holy Spirit was supposed to control us." Yes, but that's not the whole truth. The Holy Spirit will control us but not without the active cooperation of our own will. We can sum it up in two parallel statements. We cannot do it without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not do it without us. I'll say that again. We cannot do it without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not do it without us.

This principle is brought out very clearly by Paul in Philippians 2:12–13 where he says:

> "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (NAS)

The whole process of salvation originates with God. God works in us. He works in us both to will what is right and to do what is right. But as God works in us, He requires us to work out. So, we work out and God works in. But the extent to which God works in is limited by the extent to which we work out. When we cease to work out, then there's no more room for God to work in. So the whole process of salvation has two aspects: God's work, our work. God works in, we work out.

This applies particularly to the fruit of self-control. It does not operate without the exercise of our will. When Paul wants to illustrate what self-control is in the Christian life, he turns to the field of athletics. This is what he says in 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. And everyone who competes in the games [that's the Olympic Games] exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

Of course our modern Olympic Games are actually based on the Olympic Games that were familiar in the ancient world in the days of Paul. The prize for the winner in the ancient Olympic Games was a laurel wreath, which, of course, quickly withered away. So Paul says they go to all that trouble, they put in all that effort, just to gain a wreath that's going to wither. But, he says if we put in a corresponding effort in our Christian endeavor, if we exercise similar self-control, we will gain a wreath or a prize that does not fade away. Of course, in modern athletics the prize is a gold medal but even a gold medal, though it may last a long while, ultimately is impermanent. So Paul's point is they're doing it for something so impermanent, something that's worth so little intrinsically, but we are doing it for something that is permanent and of incalculable worth. So, he says if they do it for that kind of motive, how much more should we do it for our kind of motive. And then he applies it to himself. He says:

> "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim [I'm running for a mark, he says]; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified [that is, ruled out from winning the prize because I haven't kept the rules]." (NAS)

When we consider all that Paul had achieved in his life and ministry, it should surely both warn us and humble us that he still viewed it as a possibility that he might ultimately be disqualified from the prize if he did not maintain control of his own body.

The example of athletics applies, of course, at least as forcefully to us today as it did in Paul's day. As a matter of fact, athletics and the World Olympics and so on, are from time to time in everybody's mind and everybody's television screen.

What kind of life does a modern athlete have to lead if he is going to be successful, if he's going to run faster or jump higher or put the shot further or cast the javelin further than all his competitors? I would say this: An athlete's

self-discipline affects every major area of his life. What he eats, what he drinks, the hours he sleeps, the things he reads. A major part of victory in athletics is having the right psychological point of view. It affects his friends and associates. He mixes with people who will encourage him, people who have similar values, not people who will distract him or tempt him into pleasures, or forms of indulgence that will impede his chances of success.

All these principles apply to us as Christians. Self-control affects every major area of our lives. What we eat, what we drink, the hours we sleep, the things we read, the people we associate with.

Now, an athlete's success depends ultimately on his motivation. He has a specific goal to achieve. He wants to jump just one inch higher than anybody else has ever jumped or do a certain distance just a little faster than anybody else has ever done it. That's his goal. His goal is his motivation. It's what enables him to go through with his very rigorous training.

The same applies to us as Christians. If we have the right goal, it will enable us to practice self-control. Without the right goal, we will fail. What should be our goal? I would answer this: Our goal should be to have every faculty in every area of our lives disciplined and trained to accomplish God's highest purpose for our lives. That's more than just getting to heaven. If we keep this objective before us, we will be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices that self-control demands.

All right. Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday. Next week, I'll be sharing with you on another rich and exciting theme. I'll be presenting to you some more Keys for Successful Living.

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Transcript: TS-R010-105-ENG
Last Updated: 12 Apr 2023
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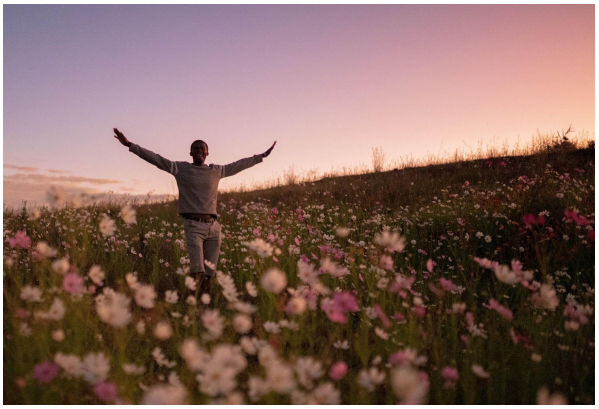

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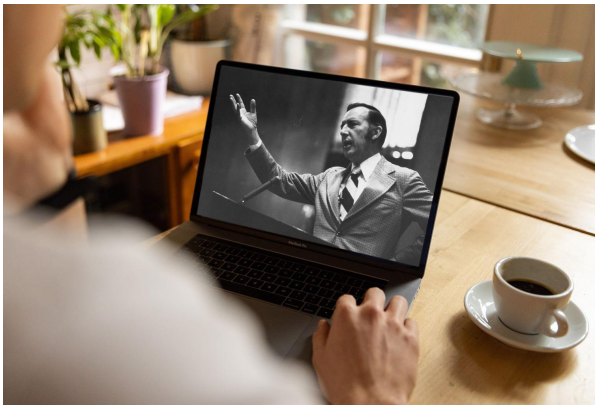

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