

“Self-Control”

Proverbs 25:28

June 29, 2025

Preacher Ace Davis¹ explains the meaning of the parable that is our Biblical text for today by giving a memorable example of its metaphor:

In Joshua 6, God spoke to Joshua and told him how to take the city of Jericho for the Israelites by knocking down its walls. So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

Without walls, the Israelites were able to march right in and capture the city. In biblical times the walls of a city were its main defense. If a city was without walls it was easy for an enemy to come in and capture it. It would be foolish to have a city with no walls because that would be an open invitation for the enemy to come and take it over.

Proverbs 25:28 says, “A person without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” God is telling us here that we are like the city of Jericho, open to the attacks of the enemy and waiting for destruction when we don’t practice self-control. As believers, we face temptation on a daily basis. Self-control is the wall of defense against the sinful desires that wage war against our soul. We must be like a city with strong walls as we practice self-control.

And how do we do that, you may wonder? How we do that is through the power of the Holy Spirit! As preacher Chelsea Mosher² puts it, “We ask the Holy Spirit to weed out sin in our lives on a daily basis and fill us up with Christlikeness instead.”

Early on in the Bible, we hear another metaphor: God compares the lack of self-control to opening the door to an animal stalking us. God says to Cain in Genesis, “Why are you angry

¹ Ace Davis, “Relearning the Discipline of Self-Control in a Society of Instant Gratification, Part 1.”

² Chelsea Mosher, “Fruit of the Spirit: Self-control looks like Christlikeness.”

and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you but you must master it.”

Both of these examples point to the fact that we need defenses against sin. And that defense is not simply will power, That defense is Christ; he took on our sin and overcame it so that we might have his righteousness. With him, we can say “Not my will but thine be done.” As preacher David Matthis³ says, “The key to self-control is not inward, but upward.” We move from being “sin and self-controlled” to being Spirit controlled.⁴

Self-control, then, is a gift. It is God’s gift in Jesus, the Spirit. But we also must make a **choice to obey God’s command.** Some of you know Max Lucado and his writings. Some time ago he wrote this beautiful summary piece about the fruit of the Spirit and choice in his journal:⁵

It’s quiet. It’s early. My coffee is hot. The sky is still black. The world is still asleep. The day is coming.

In a few moments the day will arrive. It will roar down the track with the rising of the sun. The stillness of the dawn will be exchanged for the noise of the day. The calm of solitude will be replaced by the pounding pace of the human race. The refuge of the early morning will be invaded by decisions to be made and deadlines to be met. For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day’s demands. It is now that I must make a choice.

Because of Calvary, I’m free to choose. And so I choose.

I choose love. No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose joy. I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical... the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human

³ David Matthis, “Self-control and the Power of Christ.”

⁴ Brian Bill, “Seizing Self-Control.”

⁵ Max Lucado, “It is a New Day.”

beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.

I choose peace. I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose patience. I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite Him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of clenching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

I choose kindness. I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness. I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

I choose faithfulness. Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My wife will not question my love. And my children will never fear that their father will not come home.

I choose gentleness. Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

I choose self-control. I am a spiritual being. After this body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal. I choose self-control. I will be drunk only by joy. I will be impassioned only by my faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To these I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek His grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.

When we get down to it, we realize that this fruit of the Spirit assumes two things. One, it assumes that there is something in us that needs to be bridled⁶. This is sin. Two, it assumes that there is a higher power than us or that sin which we can rely on to help us.

There are so many other places in the Bible which speak to this issue of self-control. In 2nd Timothy 1:7, Paul writes:

for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Romans 12 says:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Proverbs 4 says:

*My son, pay attention to what I say;
turn your ear to my words.
Do not let them out of your sight,
keep them within your heart;
for they are life to those who find them
and health to one's whole body.
Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.
Keep your mouth free of perversity;
keep corrupt talk far from your lips.
Let your eyes look straight ahead;
fix your gaze directly before you.*

⁶ David Mathis speaks about this in "Self Control and the Power of Christ."

*Give careful thought to the paths for your feet
and be steadfast in all your ways.
Do not turn to the right or the left;
keep your foot from evil.*

I began this sermon with an explanation of a metaphor, and I close it now with another one. Preacher Alister Begg⁷ has written:

How then does self-control become part and parcel of our lives? How does self-control become the new normal? The beginning of self-mastery is to be mastered by Christ.

Greater degrees of self-control will come not in an instant but in the day-by-day walk of saying yes to God and His glory and saying no to anything that would waylay us on the road to that highest end. Sometimes, we will have to muster all the willpower we have to flee sin and resist the devil. But sheer effort will not provide us with all the resolve we need. What we need is to be taken up in and overwhelmed by the wonder of God's grace to us in Christ.

The sirens of Greek mythology were half-woman, half-bird creatures who would beguile and entrance sailors with their singing. When the Argonaut hero Orpheus passed by the sirens' islands, he determined that instead of resisting by sheer willpower, he would charm himself and his men with a superior song. He used his lyre to play a louder and better song, which allowed him and his men to pass by temptation unharmed.

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The psalmist sings to God, "A Day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" . What He offers is infinitely better than anything this world can give us. When we become captivated by the beauty and awe of who God is to us in Christ, then the world's siren song begins to fade

⁷ Alistair Begg, "Self Control."

away. When Christ is all in all, then we understand how fleeting, feeble, and futile everything else really is by comparison.

The fruit of this world sparkles and shines, and our hearts are drawn to its pleasures. But it's all a veneer. That fruit is rotten, putrid, deadly. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—is a lasting treasure. There is no more worthy pursuit in all the world. Earthly pleasures will fade away, but the fruit that God's Spirit produces in His people will endure unto eternal life.

Amen and Amen.