

## ADD TO YOUR FAITH...SELF-CONTROL

In issues 15 and 16, we have looked at **2 Peter 1:5-11** and the Lord's command for us to grow spiritually. We have studied virtue and knowledge, following the pattern of **verses 5-7**. We must make every effort to stand up for what is right without compromise at all times, and we must work hard at acquiring knowledge through studying the word of God.

Next, we see that we are to add self-control to our faith. Besides this passage, the Greek word for self-control is found only in **Acts 24:25** and **Galatians 5:23**. The word refers literally to "inner strength." **Acts 24:25** says that Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness, **self-control**, and judgment to come. It is clear that self-control is a fundamental part of the gospel. We must exercise inner strength to achieve the righteousness of God or face judgment.

The problem is that we all have failed at some time or another to exercise self-control. We will not be able to stand before God on the Day of Judgment. This is why Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Through His blood, our sins can be washed away, forgiven. We cannot work our way unto salvation.

However, we can and must work out our own salvation (**Philippians 2:12**) after we receive the forgiveness of our sins through the grace of God and the blood of Christ. Part of that working out of our salvation is using self-control (inner strength) in building our character. This is what **Galatians 5:23** says is to happen to us as the fruit of the Spirit. But it doesn't just happen to us while we passively wait for the Spirit to work on us. We are to be diligent to add self-control to our faith.

It is interesting to notice that Galatians 5:23 couples self-control with meekness. Meekness is a Spirit-controlled mind, and temperance is a mind-controlled body, which means that the body is controlled ultimately by the Spirit (this is not spirit possession of a body!). **1 Corinthians 6:18-20** say that the fact that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit means that we need to use self-control to obey the commands to avoid fornication and glorify God with our bodies.

There are three major areas where we need to exercise self-control: the lusts of the flesh (what the body craves: **1 John 2:16**), the tongue (**James 3:2**), and the appropriate demonstration of the proper emotions at the right time (**Proverbs 25:28**).

God our Creator made us with the ability to feel the emotions we feel, to use our tongue to speak, and to need certain things in order to live. In His wisdom, He has revealed His will about how we should use these parts of our lives in the right way. Satan tempts us to (mis)use them.

We must not let the needs or the desires of the body to control us. Several passages teach us this principle in addition to the three passages that use the word "self-control." **1 Corinthians 6:12** says it well, "'All things are lawful,' but I will not be brought under the power of any." The context speaks of food which God permits us to eat, but we cannot let our desire for food control our lives to the degree that we are a bad spiritual influence on others. God made our bodies to need rest, but we must not let the body's desire for rest go unchecked so that we become lazy and slothful.

When we hear the word "temperance," we often think of abstaining from alcohol. It is another craving the body (and mind, too) has, and the best thing is never to introduce alcohol to the body so that it will strongly crave it and become an addiction. Alcohol and other addictions have ruined many lives, not only of the drinkers but of their families and associates.

A big problem area for self-control is the body's natural desire for sexual fulfillment. God in His wisdom has given a lawful relationship for fulfillment of this physical need (**1 Corinthians 7:2**), which is marriage. God does not want us to be in a situation in which we cannot control ourselves and yield to the temptation to find another outlet for sexual desire to be fulfilled. Joseph understood the danger and literally fled from fornication.

We must also control our desire for more things as though we will be better off with those things. **Ecclesiastes 1:8** says that the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing.

We must be careful with our speech. James says that anyone who can control the tongue can control his whole body. The tongue is indeed very difficult to control. This is why we must be diligent to add self-control of our tongues to our faith. Control of the tongue means saying what needs to be said when it needs to be said, but we usually have a problem not refraining from things that we should not say. One of the first proverbs in the book of Proverbs (**Prov. 10:19**) says, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking; but he who restrains his lips is wise." We get ourselves into less trouble by being careful and cautious with our words. The fool doesn't care. He only cares about expressing his feelings regardless of whose else's feelings are hurt (**Proverbs 18:2**). We must be careful to tell only the truth and not ever need to swear (**Matthew 5:33-36**). We will give account for every idle word spoken. This is because our speech emanates from the heart (**Matt. 12:33-37**). Our heart condition is revealed by the things we automatically say without thinking whenever we are happy, angry, or upset in any way. We must train ourselves to be careful that our speech is graceful at all times, not just at church. And we must be careful in our service to God. **Ecclesiastes 5:1** says that *"it is better to draw near to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil."*

Since the heart is the source of our words (even the thoughtless ones), then we need to control our emotions. **Proverbs 4:23** says to keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. If we can control our spirits, then we will be able to control our speech and our bodies' appetites. **Proverbs 16:32** says, *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."*

Even if we cannot control our emotions, we must still control our behavior instead of letting our uncontrolled emotions control our behavior. See **Proverbs 29:11**. The wise man restrains displaying all his feelings, but the fool does not. In some cases, God required people not to display their emotions. One of the most difficult commands in the Bible was God telling Aaron that he must not show any sign of mourning for his two sons who just died offering unauthorized fire to the Lord (**Leviticus 10:6-7**). We may not always be able to control our feelings, but we had better control how we act on them.