

Galatians 5:22-26

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So, how does this quality of self-control work out practically in a believer's life? What are some examples of how self-control works? Well, let us suppose that someone does something to you or says something to you that you do not appreciate. What are you going to do? How are you going to respond to something that is unpleasant in your life when this happens? Well, you simply need to exercise self-control and refrain from saying anything back to them in a retaliatory way. What if you find yourself being tempted to do something that is spiritually inappropriate such as curse or watch something ungodly. What are you going to do? Well, you need to exercise self-control, bite your tongue, or cut off the computer, your cell phone, or your television. What should you do when you begin to develop ungodly thoughts in your mind? You have to exercise self-control and begin to think on things that are lovely, pure, and just. The discipline for my life is that when that happens that I begin to pray for lost people and I immediately go to the blood of Christ and begin to praise God for all that He has done for me. What do you do if you are taking a test and are tempted to cheat? You exercise self-control and simply cast down vain imaginations and everything that is contrary to the Word of God. All of these things should be spiritually intuitive for someone who is allowing their life to be lived under the control of the Holy Spirit. It should be just as clear how we are to live even when things may not be as strong of a temptation as these examples.

Self-control is a constant challenge to anyone who truly desires to honor Christ in their life, and I would imagine that everyone has some area of their life, maybe multiple areas, where they genuinely need a high level of self-control in order to be successful in their Christian life. What is important about self-control as much as it is with all of the other gifts of the Spirit is that exercising self-control is a mindset, an outlook, a belief, a conviction, a state of mind, a way of thinking. You will never exercise self-control in a tempting situation if you have not determined to do so before a conflict actually occurs because the strength of the temptation will be stronger than your spiritual resolve to not yield to the temptation.

Every time that I think of men in the Scriptures who lacked self-control, Samson, David, and Solomon always come to mind. These men simply lacked self-control, and what that lack of self-control cost them is almost undefinable. For any believer, just a momentary lack of self-control can lead to their spiritual demise and downfall. Both their integrity and character can be forfeited in just one small moment of indiscretion and foolishness. When I think of men who did have self-control, I immediately think of Joseph and how he endured so much, but never became bitter or revengeful. Daniel exercised great self-restraint. Paul never wavered in his commitment and self-control. [2 Peter 1:5-7](#) says,

^{2Pe 1:5 (NKJV) But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.}

When I read that passage, I have to ask the obvious question – for what “**reason**”? Why am I to be diligent, why am I to have faith and virtue? Why am I to have knowledge? Why am I to have self-control and perseverance and godliness and kindness and love? It is because of v3-4 and that God has “**given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**” and because we “**have been given...exceedingly great and precious promises**”. If you truly want what God has divinely ordained for your life and those attributes and qualities that help you to lead a godly life, then these are the attributes that you want to be working in your life. In this verse, self-control demands that we have a high level of spiritual knowledge. The process of developing self-control does not happen in a vacuum, but occurs in the context of having a high level of biblical knowledge, of trusting God’s Word that it is able to strengthen you mightily in times of temptation and discouragement. The Christian life cannot be lived in an intellectual vacuum void of a knowledge of God’s Word. If a Christian is going to be able to grow in their Christian life, it is essential that they understand certain vital and indispensable biblical principles.¹ This is essential and mandatory for anyone who wants to live a successful and fruitful Christian life. A Christian void of spiritual knowledge will quickly lose their way and become prey to the destructive influences of the flesh. So, spiritual knowledge is one of the important foundational elements of a successful Christian life. However, it should be noted that just having spiritual knowledge is not sufficient. In fact, for a believer to have biblical knowledge but not appropriate it in their life is actually a sin. For instance, [James 4:17](#) says,

Jas 4:17 (NKJV) Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

[Hebrews 10:26](#) gives a very strong warning relative to taking sin lightly when it says,

Heb 10:26 (NKJV) For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

The simple fact still remains, however, that in order for a believer to grow spiritually requires the acquisition and application of spiritual truth into their life. From beginning to end, the Christian life is founded on spiritual knowledge, biblical principles, sound doctrine, and life-changing truth found only in the Word of God. So, if someone simply chooses to ignore and carelessly disregard the truths provided in Scripture, then in reality they are neglecting the one thing that they need the most in order to grow spiritually.

Too often the Christian culture has been a detriment to actually encouraging believers to a deeper pursuit of biblical understanding. In many places doctrine has become a spiritually moot point. Between an easy-believism mentality and a fundamental lack of interest in doctrine and theology, the average believer has succumbed to a spiritual lethargy and doctrinal indifference that fosters mediocrity. Doctrine is for living, so when someone ignores and disregards the foundational dogma of Scripture, the inevitable result is an inability to understand and appropriate God’s life transforming truths into their lives. Rather than becoming the “**pillar and ground of the truth**” ([1 Timothy 3:15](#)), the church has become the seedbed for spiritual mediocrity. Rather than passing on the truth in a convincing and persuasive way, the church is passing on a kind of meaningless spiritual rhetoric that is having very little impact on the lives of the next generation.

¹ MacArthur, *Conscience*, 214.

If you discern what Peter is saying relative to any of these attributes, but especially in the case of self-control, he gives us the answer in [2 Peter 1:8](#). These are the qualities that when they “**abound**” in our life, it means that we will be “**neither barren nor unfruitful**” in knowing what God wants us to do. However, if we lack these attributes, it means that we are very “**shortsighted, even to blindness**” and that we have “**forgotten**” what Christ did for us. When you see someone who simply lacks self-control in different areas of their behavior, it means that they are “**shortsighted**”, and close to actual spiritual “**blindness**”. That word means to be see something dimly, to actually shut the eyes, to squint like someone who cannot see clearly.² Spiritually, it is the idea of ignoring, of disregarding, of snubbing God’s work in this area of your life and not allowing God to develop these qualities in your life with the ensuing result that you could literally become spiritually blind to what God desires for your life.

The unfortunate legacy of some people who do not take these truths seriously and who do not have the discipline and self-control to allow the Holy Spirit to develop these qualities in their life is that at the end of their life they have nothing but regret at not living for Christ. They reach that point where they realize that it is way too late to do anything about their spiritual indifference, disobedience, and laziness to commit themselves fully to Christ. They have forfeited everything of value for things that have no eternal merit whatsoever. Literally, nothing could be any more tragic than to reach the end of our life and realize that we wasted it completely on nothing that counted before God. We lived for ourselves, we talked how we wanted to talk, we said what we wanted to say, we disregarded the clear commands of Scripture, and we enter into heaven with all the knowledge that anyone could have had to only realize that it meant nothing to us. We were selfish, uninterested, disobedient, and ultimately unusable in God’s kingdom. We never made a difference in anyone’s life. That is the tragedy of being “**shortsighted, even to blindness**”.

It should be obvious that a life of godliness requires great self-control in our life all the time. There is never a day where we have the privilege of living how we want to live without regard to the Word of God and its constant demands on our life. However, anyone who truly develops and applies this quality of self-control in their life will exercise great restraint and discipline over their behavior, their speech, and their attitudes. They will always have a calm approach to their life and their witness. They will earn the respect and gratitude of their peers, and they will find themselves being used by God in ways that glorify and honor His person.

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² Zodhiates, 1000.