

What Happens When the Wall of Self-Control Falls Down?

Galatians 5:22-23; Proverbs 25:28

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What happens when the wall of self-control falls down in the life of a Christian?

Dear ones, we are no different in this respect to those found in the pages of Scripture. **Noah** becomes drunk with wine. **Jacob** lies to his father, Isaac, in order to secure the birthright. **Aaron** makes a calf of gold before which Israel worships. **King Saul** is filled with rage against David. **David** lusts after and commits adultery with Bathsheba. **Peter** fears and denies even knowing the Lord Jesus three times. Who among us does not struggle to some degree in exercising a consistent biblical self-control over sins and weaknesses in one area or another (over lusts and practices of the flesh, over fears and worries in this life, over preoccupation with what we look like outwardly, over indulging our appetites, over succumbing to peer pressure and compromise from family and friends, or over self-centered ambition and the applause of others)?

Dear ones, when the wall of self-control falls down at any one place, the enemies within and without are sure to find that breach in the wall and to rush in like an army to exploit our sins and weaknesses. Our testimony for Jesus Christ will stand or fall to the degree that the wall of biblical self-control stands or falls in our lives.

This last fruit of the Spirit (self-control) binds together all nine of these fruits (listed in Galatians 5:22-23). For if we are not growing in this last fruit of temperance (or self-control) in seeing God's Spirit ruling and subduing our passions, our emotions, our feelings, our sin, and our weaknesses, the other eight fruit of the Spirit are going to be hindered in their growth in our lives. For without the wall of self-control standing firmly to protect us from the sinful desires and weaknesses that would attack and overwhelm us, we would live under the complete control and dominion of our worldly desires in following what pleases us most. God has given us a fruit of the Spirit (temperance/self-control) that protects us from sin that would otherwise invade us like a mighty army. This may be the last fruit of the Spirit that is listed in Galatians 5:22-23, but it is far from being the least fruit of the Spirit listed.

The main points from the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Fruit of Temperance/Self-Control Defined (Galatians 5:23); (2) The Fruit of Temperance/Self-Control Applied (Proverbs 25:28).

I. The Fruit of Temperance/Self-Control Defined (Galatians 5:23).

A. The Greek word translated as "temperance" (*egkrateia* in Galatians 5:23) literally refers to "the power or lordship which one has either over oneself or over something" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II:339).

1. Various Greek lexicons and dictionaries translate this word as self-control, self-rule, self-discipline, temperance, moderation, or continence. Temperance as understood in Galatians 5:23 is the supernatural grace to rule over our desires, affections, passions, and appetites, over our body, our eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet, and over our possessions, dreams, and accomplishments to the glory of God rather than to the glory of self.

2. Thus, the end of self-control is not to promote self, but is to subdue self that we might love and serve Jesus Christ with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And it is not only a fruit of the Spirit that all Christians have and are to be growing in their lives, but is especially a fruit in the character of one called to the ministry as an example to the flock of Jesus Christ (Titus 1:7-8).

3. Although self-control is a supernatural fruit of the Holy Spirit that all Christians possess as a part of their inheritance purchased for them by Jesus Christ, it is a fruit like all of the other fruit that grows in our lives **in proportion** to our prayer, and to our care and work to stimulate its growth in our life by the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we must be diligent to exercise ourselves to our growth in self-control, but apart from the Spirit of God working within us both to will and to do His good pleasure—all our work would be in vain.

a. This hard work of bringing our desires, our thoughts, our plans, our gifts and abilities under the control of our new man in Christ is especially highlighted in the language of Paul (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), who says that we should run the race of faith before us as an Olympian athlete who is “temperate in all things” (i.e. who subdues all desires and passions and who brings his body under subjection and control in order to finish the race God has set before us). Growing in the fruit of self-control is growing in the grace of bringing even our thoughts and desires into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

b. Dear ones, growing in self-control is not easy work, for bringing our desires, plans, ambitions, and affections under the control of the new creation that we are in Christ and to the glory of Christ is so contrary to the old sinful man which sees this fruit of self-control to be his own death and demise. The old man is fighting to survive, and sees the fruit of self-control as hastening his death; and such is truly the case.

B. Having given a definition of the biblical fruit of temperance or self-control, let us briefly distinguish this biblical fruit from worldly counterfeits.

1. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** being led by your feelings. Biblical self-control is really not about the power of self, but about the power of Christ to control self. So it is perhaps more theologically accurate not to call this fruit of the Spirit “self-control”, but rather “Christ-control”. This biblical view of self-control does not wait for your feelings to rise up to the point that they lead you in what is your duty to do, but rather is led by one’s submission to the revealed will of God (taking up the yoke of Christ in meekness). And that is not hypocrisy. There are many things that we do every day that we don’t feel like doing (e.g. getting out of bed in the morning, going to work, but this fruit of the Spirit brings those thoughts and feelings under captivity to Christ). Dear ones, your feelings should be led by your faith, love, and submission to Christ (not the other way around), but you should always be praying to the Lord that sanctified feelings and desires would soon accompany your duty and surrender to the will of God.

2. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** simply closing your mouth and biting your tongue when in public and then spewing forth all that anger and resentment (or punching a pillow) when you are in the “safe” confines of your own home. It is rather bringing that inward anger under the control of the Holy Spirit, so that at the first awareness of it, it is taken seriously, confessed to the Lord, repented of, and surrendered to Christ, so that it doesn’t grow even within your heart. Keeping the anger from striking others in public may derail some terrible consequences, but that alone is not self-control.

3. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** simply a New Year’s resolution to make some change in your life. This the world strives to do so by way of a New Year’s resolutions to control this or that area of one’s life to some mere earthly or temporal end. However, this biblical fruit of self-control is energized by the Holy Spirit within your life to subdue your life to the glory of Jesus Christ—thus, putting to death that which hinders you in the race of faith, so that you can run the race with patience, endurance, and perseverance in Jesus Christ.

4. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** about controlling your response to the agitations of this world so that you can retreat to some inward nirvana of peace and contentment. Biblical self-control does not make its primary focus upon self, but upon Christ and His power to overcome and control our lives to His own glory. Once again, biblical self-control is not being consumed with self—whether with your sins and

weaknesses, or with your perceived strengths or with your own thoughts, ways, and desires. Biblical self-control is one in which our faith is looking to Christ and His promises, our love is looking to Christ and His commandments, and our hope is looking to Christ and His coming. There is not help or growth in being consumed with self—there is only help and growth in being consumed with Christ and His power to work effectually in our lives. Biblical self-control is not being filled with self, but denying self, taking up our cross, and following Christ.

5. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** a religious asceticism wherein you deprive yourself of earthly comforts and necessities in order to earn some benefit from the Lord (as is done in all religions except biblical Christianity). In such a case self-control simply becomes a Covenant of Works wherein we seek to earn God's favor and benefits. However, even when God graciously rewards us for subduing the sinful desires and passions of our heart, it is all of His grace. For He freely works within us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), and then freely rewards us for doing what He has given us the grace to do—He receives all of the glory.

6. The biblical fruit of self-control is **NOT** one of marching against the use of alcoholic beverages (e.g. temperance societies and temperance marches of the past). The biblical fruit of self-control firmly believes that nothing of a material substance created by God is sinful in itself, but rather the sin in using that which God has provided proceeds from the sinful heart of man in abusing what God has given to us (whether alcohol, money, possessions, family, sex—cp. Matthew 15:19-20).

II. The Fruit of Temperance/Self-Control Applied (Proverbs 25:28).

A. In order that we may know the necessity of the biblical fruit of self-control in our Christian lives, Solomon gives to us the terrible consequences of ignoring and neglecting this fruit of the Spirit. It is like a city which is under siege by an enemy who find some breach or opening through the walls—once that entrance into the city is found, the walls will be attacked until they crumble and the full force of the enemy can then rush into the city to destroy it.

1. In ancient times the walls of a city were its chief defense against the attack of its enemies.

a. Not only did fortified walls keep enemies out of the city, but also from high above on the walls of the city could the battle be carried forth by way of shooting arrows from that high ground, and by way of dropping cauldrons of hot oil and fire or heaving large stones upon the advancing enemy below.

b. Therefore, the one object of the enemy that was outside the walls of the city was to get over the walls, or to break through the walls of the city. The great walls around a city were always the first and main obstacle to overcome in order to overwhelm a city.

c. And once the walls of the city were breached by an invading force, and the city subsequently conquered, the conquering army would tear down the walls of that city. This would render the people defenseless from further attacks and would keep the city from rebelling against the conquering king. Once the walls were broken down, resistance to the forces of the enemy became a moot point.

2. Thus, the point of Solomon's proverb is that the biblical fruit of self-control is our wall of defense against sinful thoughts, desires, passions, lusts, worldliness, idolatry, bitterness, worry, doubt etc. But once the biblical fruit of self-control is compromised, breached, and torn down, we will find enemies to our soul seeking to rush through the breach and seeking to lead us captive to their evil designs.

a. Dear ones, our work in defending our lives against the attacks of the enemy is not finished once that wall of self-control is established when we are regenerated. The Christian is to make it his/her constant duty to watch for the first signs of weakness in the wall of self-control. If lustful temptations come your way (or if worry, fear, pride, idolatry seek to overwhelm you), what are you doing to fortify the wall

of self-control against those lustful thoughts? It is that fruit of the Spirit that God has given to you to defend you and to prevent those enemies from breaking through to overwhelm you. Walking around and inspecting the wall of self-control each day so as to repair some weak spot is necessary if you would keep these enemies from gaining a foothold in your life. Dear ones, where are you weak in resisting the attacks of the enemy? Are you daily inspecting and fortifying the walls of self-control against these attacks? Where we take not such steps, we will have no excuse when overwhelmed by the enemy.

b. In fact, such an unrepaired or broken down wall of self-control is like an open invitation to the invader. If our hearts are known to be well fortified by the enemy, the constant repelling of the enemy by means of biblical self-control will have the effect of fortifying and re-fortifying the wall against those wicked thoughts, words, and deeds that tempt us. A weak wall welcomes the enemy, but a strong wall sends the enemy away (as in the temptations of Christ, Luke 4:13). One whose wall of self-control is broken down is giving "place to the devil [or a beachhead to the devil]" (Ephesians 4:27).

3. There are two general areas in our lives that we should check daily to see that the wall of self-control is strong and fortified against the enemy.

a. **The Body.** Think of the many different ways that the enemy seeks to break through the walls of self-control in regard to the body: by means of what we look at with our eyes (immodestly dressed people or pornography on TV or the internet), by means of what we hear with our ears (sensual and profane music and jokes), by means of what we say with our tongues (angry outbursts, lying, boasting, gossip, unwarranted criticism), and by means of what we use our bodies for (to flirt with the affections of others, to encourage sexual desires by immodest dress/behavior, to use our bodies for that which is impure sexual behavior).

b. **The Heart.** Think of the many different ways that the enemy seeks to break through the walls of self-control in regard to the heart: by means of our affections, by means of our desires, by means of our ambitions, by means of our compromises, by means of pride, by means of our fears, by means of our idols that no one else may see, by means of hatred, by means of self-pity, by means of discontentment.

B. What steps should we be taking to fortify the walls of self-control in our lives?

1. **Rest** in the promise of God's grace and power to build the wall of self-control. Without Christ you can do nothing (John 15:5), but you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). It is by God's grace (from start to finish) that the wall of self-control is built and fortified by the Holy Spirit. So often when something in our life fails, we just have a "fix it" mentality ("The wall of self-control is down, I must fix it"). That is getting the cart before the horse. No, you first need Christ in all of His glory, power, and grace. You are more than conquerors **THROUGH CHRIST** who loved you and gave His life for you (Romans 8:37). Dear ones, you cannot skip over this step, for there is no hope apart from it.

2. **Examine** every day the wall of self-control in your life. Walk around and inspect where the wall of self-control in your life is strong by God's grace, where it is weak and vulnerable to attack, and where it needs to be fortified.

3. **Pray** fervently daily and throughout the day that God would grant you the desire, the perseverance, and the strength to fortify the wall of self-control (especially the places in the wall that you have already identified as vulnerable to attack). If fortifying the wall of self-control is the revealed will of God (as we have seen that it is), then it is a good gift for which to constantly plead with your Heavenly Father to give to you, who will indeed give that which is good (Matthew 7:11). Enjoy your communion with Christ privately, with your family, and with your brethren.

4. **Read** and memorize specific passages of Scripture that apply to that spiritual enemy concerning which the wall of self-control has been vulnerable. Scripture is the sword of the Spirit to do battle with the enemy (Ephesians 6:17). For example, your wall of self-control is vulnerable to the attacks of lust (Galatians 5:24), fear (Hebrews 13:6), pride (1 Corinthians 10:12).

5. **Exercise** yourself to godliness and self-control (1 Timothy 4:7). Exercise yourself in all matters related to godliness, for there is a connection between all vice. One weak unattended area in the wall will expose other weak unattended areas of the wall. Likewise, there is a connection between all virtue (growing in all of the fruit of the Spirit will strengthen the wall of self-control).

6. **Take** your burden to other Christians that you trust that you might have their help in accountability, their prayers, their correction, and their encouragement in fortifying the wall of self-control and self-discipline (Galatians 6:1-2).

7. **Don't flirt** with the enemy outside the walls. Don't taunt and tease the enemy outside the walls. Despise and hate the enemy outside the walls and give no occasion to the flesh to break through the walls by a relaxed and casual approach to the enemy—it is the enemy!

8. **Don't wallow** in unrepentant sin for days, for it will lead to weeks, months, and years. Repent quickly; rebuild the walls of self-control immediately. The longer you remain in an unrepentant condition and the longer the walls of self-control remain breached, the more likely the enemy will infiltrate and overwhelm you (Proverbs 24:16)

9. **Look** in hope to that eternal city that needs no walls of defense to keep the enemy out ("And the gates of it shall not be shut at all" Revelation 21:25). Without hope of final victory over these enemies that look for and breach the walls of self-control in our lives presently, we would cast up our hands in despair and quit. What a blessed and certain hope is ours in that everlasting city of peace, whose King, whose Wall, and whose Fortress, is our Great God and Savior. In that city there will never be another breach, for there will never be another attack from an enemy. In that city we will be safe, secure, in perfect peace, forever set apart from sin, temptation, tears, sorrow, and failure. Dear Christian, cast your eye of hope often upon that city where the only walls are the walls of salvation through the finished death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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