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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Self-Control**

**Galatians 5:22-23**

**Prayer:** *Father God, we do again praise you and thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for your saints who are continuing to speak the truth even in incredibly difficult circumstances, and again, Lord, we just thank you for their courage. We pray for continued grace for them. And Lord, for ourselves today we just again rejoice and we thank you that we have the safety and the privilege of still meeting tomorrow without fear. I pray that as we do that this morning that we would have the privilege and the presence of your Holy Spirit. Again, Lord, we just acknowledge without that presence, we have no hope whatsoever. And so I pray that you would speak to us, open our eyes, open our ears, give us the ability to take in your word and to again make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Galatians 5:22-23 is what we've been speaking about for months now, it is this: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-*

*control; against such things there is no law.* And this morning we're looking at the very last in the row of the fruits of the Spirit, actually it's more of a next to the last, we're going to be looking at love separately from all the other fruits because as I've mentioned before, you can look at the fruits of the Spirit as one large fruit like a grapefruit and you can label that whole fruit "love" and then open it up and realize that inside that grapefruit are all these different wedges, and every one of those wedges is an expression of the love of Christ in us. And what we've been doing these last few months is kind of peeling open the grapefruit and looking at one every one of those wedges, and those are the fruits that make up the fruit. And I said last time that fruit bearing is not at all about self-improvement but instead it really is about glory, and it's about God's glory.

So let me explain basically how this fruit bearing works by giving you some of my own personal history. 41 years ago, God took my fallen, sin-filled life and he opened up my eyes and he gave me new life in Christ, but then he set about a divinely ordained task of molding me into the image of his son. Now his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the essence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And it is God's intent to see that essence manifested in my life and your life as well. Not just so that I can be fulfilled and improved,

even though I will, but so that he, that is, Jesus Christ would be glorified in my fruit bearing. See, the fact is we exist for him and not vice versa. And God has only one method, one technique, and one principle that he uses to grow these fruits of the Spirit. The principle we've heard time and time again is *Romans 8:28: We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.* The technique: *John 15: Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me.* And the method: *James 4: Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.* And again, this isn't rocket science. There's no mystery to this. What God is saying here is that every single event in your life goes to producing the very image of Jesus Christ in your life so that I may be glorified in you. That's the principle. Hang around me and I'll begin to rub off on you. That's the technique. If you move towards me, if you carve out space for me, I will respond, I will move towards you, and that's the method. So it's not hard to understand, it's just harder to put into practice.

So let's look at the fruit of the Spirit this morning known as self-control. I think one of the things that folks think of primarily when they think of self-control is obviously it's the ability to control your temper. Folks think that a self-controlled

person is someone who's mastered the art of repeating the phrase "serenity now, serenity now." I see who -- I know who the Seinfeld people are. He's not likely to blow his stack. This is somebody who's mastered the art, so we think, of counting to ten. Well, that's not really what self-control is all about. It includes it but self-control is more an act of putting my own will, my own control under the power of the Holy Spirit. James says anyone who is able to control his tongue is able to bridle his entire body. He says this in *James 3*, he says: *If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.* Now, a bridle is this small piece of metal that goes into the mouth of horses and it enables the rider to make the horse go wherever he wants it to go. Well, in the same way self-control is a bridle for the entire body. It enables you and the Holy Spirit to make the decisions as to where the body goes instead of the other way around. And every one of us knows how difficult that is. I mean, we've all experienced what it's like to have our bodies tell us what we're going to do in terms of what we're going to eat, how much we're going to sleep, what we're going to expose ourselves to whether on the Internet or on TV, how we're going to interact with our fellow human beings, and we all know what it's like to let our bodies or our minds get the best of us, which is in a sense losing control. So we know

what it's like to lose self-control.

The apostle Paul, he describes self-control in terms of athletics. This is what he says. In *1 Corinthians 9:24*, he says: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives of the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.* You know, it's likely that Paul while he was in Corinth witnessed the athletic games that took place there and so he had a frame of reference to what athletes do. And athletes back then just like today were known as people who exercised great self-control over their own bodies and they did this to win a temporal prize that began perishing as soon as they received it -- even before they received it because it was just a wreath. We have a much greater prize. We have a prize that never perishes. It is a race well run and the goal is glorifying God in our lives, and to do that we have to exercise self-control. So I want to look at three different instances in scripture where we see self-control being exercised. One is by Paul and the other two are by Jesus. We'll see Paul exercising self-control well and then we'll see Jesus exercising it perfectly.

This first instance takes place in the book of Acts. Paul is being dragged before the Sanhedrin to explain all the accusations that the Jews had been hurling toward him, and so he starts out by defending himself to his fellow Jews. This is what he says in Acts 23, he says: *And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.* I doubt any of us have ever been publicly humiliated like that. That's a low blow. Jewish law provided that everyone was entitled to a trial or a hearing without this kind of violence or humiliation and so much in this case for Jewish law. Verse 3 says: *Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"* Well, this is the old Paul. This is the natural Paul, this is Paul reacting as anyone else would to the humiliation of being slapped in the face for no good reason. And Paul is angry and he is cursing, literally he's cursing, he says God strike you. He's also name calling. I mean, whitewashed wall may not be a well known expletive in our day, but everybody knew right then and right there that he was defining his attacker in very unflattering terms. But then Paul hears this in verse 4, it says: *Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high*

priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" See, this is the new Paul. This is the new Paul with his tongue sufficiently bridled and his emotions now under his and the Holy Spirit's control. This is really what self-control looks like in action. It's putting my will and my control under the power of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how unfair and flat out wrong it was to be slapped and humiliated publicly, Paul immediately recognizes a position and an authority and a structure that God has imposed that gives even these wretched law breakers a respect that Paul instantly provides. You know, 20 years earlier in the exact same place in the Sanhedrin, Stephen was under a similar attack for believing in the risen Christ, and Paul was right there back then in the thick of it. Well, 20 years of the Holy Spirit's presence in Paul had made him so tuned in and so sensitive to God's order that his desire to honor God in that order was far greater than his desire to respond to the humiliation of being publicly slapped.

Now you know almost the exact same thing happened to the Lord Jesus Christ, and where Paul responded in a way that illustrated that he had grown in his ability, he had grown in his self-control, we see in Jesus' response the understanding that he had mastered it perfectly. It's the night of Jesus' arrest, and he, too, is

brought before the Sanhedrin. This is *John 18*, it says: *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."* When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, *"Is that how you answer the high priest?"*

Well, there's a number of notable differences between Paul's account and the account of what happened to Jesus. I mean, both Paul and Jesus, they open up by speaking the truth simply and honestly, both are publicly slapped not only to humiliate them, but because they're perceived as being out of order. But here's where the difference between Jesus and Paul becomes highly evident. You see, the person who slaps Jesus just takes it upon himself to humiliate someone he thinks is not showing proper respect to the high priest. But here's the point: Jesus is the high priest! *Hebrews 2:17* says this: *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* You see, the fact is it was Jesus who had created the office of high priest thousands of years



previously, and Ananias, the man who was acting as high priest at the time was a crook and a fraud. In fact, the entire examination was a farce and a fraud, and Jesus had every right to point that out. I mean, he could have said you just slapped the creator of the universe. He could have instantly shriveled the man's hand into a pretzel. Instead he simply counters: *"If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* You see, in case you're wondering, this is what perfect self-control looks like.

Now I have two other examples of self-control that Jesus exercised that I would like to touch on, and I suspect that both of these examples might have you scratching your head. Let's look at the first one. It's in *John 2:12-17*, it says: *After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume*

me."

Now you might think, really? Self-control? This is your example of self-control? Jesus in this passage certainly gives every appearance of having lost it. We can say where's the gentleness? Where is the self-control? Well, again, like much in scripture, this one requires that we look under the hood to get a little bit of background information to understand what it is that really took place. In order to do that, we first have to go back to the temple, to the original temple that Solomon built which was one of the seven wonders of the world. I mean, Solomon spared no expense in terms of labor or materials to build it because God himself was going to dwell in that temple. According to 2 Chronicles 2, there was 70,000 laborers, 80,000 stone cutters and 3600 foremen, all who took some seven to twenty years depending on who's counting of labor to produce that first temple. Now this is the temple that got sacked and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in fifth century BC. And by the time of Jesus' era, the temple had been restored by Herod to where it was once again a highly imposing structure. Just consider, the temple itself covered 35 acres. That's about the size of a shopping mall. And Jesus goes into the temple where verse 14: *He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple.* Okay, so where's

the self-control? Actually as you continue to read, it appears to get worse. It says: *And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.* So we get this picture of Jesus flipping over the cash registers, flipping tables, you get this idea, this picture of somebody just flipping out. So where do we get this idea of self-control in this? Well, understand first that there's two very different types of merchandising going on here that we need to look at separately to get a sense of really what's taking place. And the first is in verse 14. Jesus finds merchants selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons. So the first question we might ask is where did these folks come from? Well, here's their history. You see, centuries before, God had instituted the sacrificial system as a means of providing a bridge between a holy God and his creation. God was holy; man was not. We were sinners, we were separated from God by our sin, and in the old testament, God created a way to bridge that gap by the use of sacrificial animals, and these animals represent an innocent life that had to be sacrificed, blood that had to be shed in order for sin to be paid for. But all of these animals could only cover over sin. Only one sacrifice could actually remove it. And Jesus came to be that sacrifice. You know, when John the Baptist was baptized, and he saw Jesus coming towards him to be baptized, and he made a statement that sums up what all the sacrificial system was designed to portray. *John 1:29*, it says: *He saw Jesus coming toward him,*

*and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* See, all of the blood of all of the animals served only to cover those sins until the time when God himself would come to be a final offering for that sin. But in the temple, those animals while Jesus was there, they were still being offered. See, the way that the Jewish sacrificial system worked is that anyone, any Jew was free to bring a sacrificial animal to the temple but only the priests could certify whether or not it was blemish free. So the idea of lugging an animal miles and miles to the temple only to have a priest disqualify it made it so folks simply decided to buy their animals pre approved there at the temple. And of course they had to pay a huge premium for that. Well, that explains why they are there. Verse 14 says: *He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple.*

Here's the other bit of merchandising. See, every male Israelite had to pay the yearly temple tax of one-half a shekel, and the problem was not only that he had to pay but that he could only pay in Palestinian silver. That was the only accepted coin. And at this time there were coins circulating that were Persian, Tyrian, Syrian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman, every one of which had to be exchanged for Palestinian silver. Well, that's what the money-changers did. And typical of any Middle Eastern business

exchange, there was this constant din of haggling over what they were going to charge.

Okay. So now in order to put Jesus' response into context, you first have to picture the scene. The temple was the sacred place of residence for God. It was the place where his servants acknowledged his greatness and their sinfulness. It was the place to offer God a sacrificial substitute that pointed to the blood atonement that came only on the cross. It was the most sacred place on the planet, the place where the Creator of the universe consented to meet with his creation. Well, that was the theory. The practice was entirely different. You see, years and years had dulled the senses of the people and it turns out they no longer had any fear of God whatsoever nor any respect, and so the temple had become a bazaar, and the silence of worship had been replaced with the din of trading and haggling and argument. In addition, running right alongside the haggling of the coin changers was an ongoing cattle auction. Now understand something. This is supposed to be the most sacred place on earth. Isaiah in *Isaiah 6* gives a description of God filling the temple that points out just how sacred it was. Isaiah says this, he says: *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: With two he covered his face,*

and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, "Woe is me! For I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, the LORD of hosts!" That's a picture of God in the temple. Three times the angels declare the holiness of him whose robe filled the temple. Now this same sacred place is full of dirt and noise and filth and animals. Got a little taste of it ourselves. This sacred place is now filled with the stench of dung and urine.

And this incident isn't the only incident. There was another instance in which Jesus reacted strongly to this type of activity. It's in Mark 11, it says this: *And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."* Again, here Jesus is flipping over tables and the seats of those who sold pigeons because the

temple is now being used by these merchants as a short cut between the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Merchants would actually drive their carts with their animals and their wares through the temple in order to save the trouble of having to go around it. I mean, hence the text says in verse 16: *He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.* You know, we put up signs that say "no thru traffic" where it's inappropriate. These folks never even got that memo. So before you accuse Jesus of losing his self-control, consider the God who is due all worship and awe, he is now receiving huge doses of scorn, of derision, and of mockery, but it's not from the devil, and it's not from his enemies, and it's not even from the pagan world. It's from his own chosen people.

Now I spoke last week about gentleness. I said it is a refusal to exercise the severity of righteousness. Here's Jesus Christ, God himself coming to the temple, and if he had called down 10,000 angels to purge that place with fire, the universe would have shouted: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts! But he didn't. Instead he exhibited profound gentleness and profound self-control. But wait a minute. He made a whip, he overturned the tables, he threw out the money-changers. Where's the self-control in that, I mean, didn't Jesus just lose it? Like I said, self-control is placing the control of my will under the power of

the Holy Spirit. And may I suggest to you that the Holy Spirit was righteously outraged? And if ever there was a time when Father, Son, and Holy Spirit altogether practiced astonishing self-control, it was in that temple that was now a cesspool. Not only was Jesus exercising extraordinary self-control but he was doing it within the context of fulfilling prophesy. *John 2:17* says: *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."* *Malachi 3* says: *"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts."* You see, there's but one word to describe God's unwillingness to annihilate his mockers, and that word is grace, grace expressed in the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness and self-control. You see, if gentleness is refusing to exercise the severity of righteousness and self-control is my will placed under the power of the Holy Spirit, then I can make the statement that Jesus' gentleness and self-control in that temple was off the scale.

So how do I translate that gentleness and self-control into my life? That's the question we all want to know. And I've said it over and over again, we don't get the fruit of the Spirit by pursuing it directly. We don't get self-control by pursuing self-control. We get it by pursuing Christ. You see, if I'm somebody



who's known for flying off the handle, if I'm somebody who blows his top or frequently loses it, well how can abiding in Christ change that? We think of people who constantly lacking self-control as people who are ruled by their desires, folks who allow desire to have too great a role in driving their lives. Well, I would suggest to you that it's exactly the opposite. You see, losing self-control is not about having too much desire. It is about having not enough. Let me explain. Self-control is desire-driven. We are desire-driven. We are desire-driven creatures. Jonathan Edwards pointed out and R.C. Sproul expanded on the fact that everything we do, we only do it because it is our greatest desire at the moment. Listen to what R. C. Sproul said. Here's how he lays out the argument that we are desire-driven creatures. He says this:

"Think about Edwards'" -- that's Jonathan Edwards -- "thesis that we always choose according to the strongest inclination, or desire, of the moment. Think, if you will, of the most harmless choice that you might make in the course of a day. Perhaps you attend a meeting of a group and choose to sit on the left side in the third seat from the end of the fourth row at the front of the room. Why did you choose to sit there? In all probability, when you entered the room, you did not engage in a thorough analysis of your seating preferences. You probably did not make a chart to determine which

was the best seat. Your decision was probably made quickly, with little or no conscious evaluation and with a sense of apparent spontaneity. Does that mean, however, that there was no reason for your choice? Perhaps you sat where you did because you're comfortable sitting on the left side of the room in such meetings. Perhaps you were attracted to that seat because of its proximity to a friend or its access to the exit. In situations like this, the mind weighs a host of contributing factors so quickly that we tend to think our responses are spontaneous. The truth is that something in you triggered a desire to sit in a certain seat or else your choice was an effect without a cause."

What Sproul is saying is that even your choice today of the seat that you sat in was an effect. And every effect has to have a cause and the cause in this case is our own desire, because everything we do we do out of desire. Even choices that we can't imagine as desirable we choose because at that moment, they become our greatest desire. I mean, you might think that a dieter munching on a carrot looking at somebody eating an ice cream cone is doing something that he doesn't desire. But you see, that's not really true, the dieter is dieting because desire is driving him. In his case the desire to lose weight is greater than the desire to eat an ice cream cone. In that you will never go on a diet until your desire to lose weight is greater than your desire for fatty

foods, because we are desire driven. Sproul pointed out that even the most extreme examples point to desire driving every single decision we make. He said this, if somebody came up to you and said, "Hey, your money or your life," and sticks a gun in your head. Well, he's essentially removing from you all of the choices you would normally have and he's reducing them to only two: your money or your life. Now, you may give your -- that crook your wallet, but you certainly can't say that you gave it to him because you desired to. Or can you? You see, it's actually pretty obvious. You would have made your choice because your desire to give the crook your money is greater than your desire to get shot. The crook may have only given you two choices but it is your desire that moved you to choose. And the point is, everything we do we do because it is our greatest desire at the moment.

Jesus was also desired driven. On the night before he died, as he celebrated his last Passover meal with the disciples, he said this in *Luke 22*, he said, "*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.*" He was using a Hebrew phrase to say, "My desire is off the charts." See, Jesus' passion and desire was to do the will of his Father. His will was perfectly under the control of the Holy Spirit, and that self-control is what he wants for us. Now, the key to self-control is not sucking it up, it's not trying harder. The key to self-control is growing the right

desires. Jesus said this in *Matthew 11*, he said: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jesus says learn from me, for I am gentle. And the only way to learn from Jesus is to abide in him, and the only way to do that is to draw near to him. He says if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us, he will teach us gentleness and self-control by showing us who we really are.

Again, let me explain. When Jesus first entered the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. See, the difficulty of getting a blemish-free sacrifice had created a marketplace for those who wanted an easy way to worship God. In a sense, they wanted their credit pre approved. Sometimes that's what the church does for us. You see, church can be a place where you go to meet God, where you go to get instruction, where you go to offer up the sacrifice of praise, or it can also be a place where you go to pretend. Now, I'll never forget seeing an atheist describing the church as it's just another business. He was talking to a pastor and he said, you draw folks in and you give them some hymns and a pep talk and they think they've met God, and for this you get very handsomely paid. Well, what he said just may be true. You see, if this is your only connection to God all week,

the only time you even think about God and his kingdom, well then, he just may have a point. You see, it took years and years for the temple to go from being the most sacred place on earth to a grotesque mockery of everything that God stood for, but it happened because the people let it happen. And in some places, church still serves the purpose of making people think that they've met God when really all they've only met are the sellers of cattle, sheep, and doves, and the exchangers of coins telling them, well, they prayed a prayer, they've signed a card, they've accepted Jesus, hey, you're pre approved! That's a lie. *1 Samuel 15* says: "*Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.*"

As Jesus goes further into the temple, he finds the money-changers haggling and arguing and they had Palestinian silver, they had the coin of the realm. They had the inside track to an acceptable offering, and many of the ancient Jews must have thought, hey, blemish-free animals, Palestinian silver, I am all set! They were dead wrong. *Proverbs 21* says: *To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.* *Micah 6* says: "*With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with*

*ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O man what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? See, God is tell us, he says an acceptable sacrifice is obedience, justice, mercy, and humility, and that doesn't come from a checkbook and it doesn't come from checked off attendance. It comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

See, the fruits of the Spirit is not something that someone can manufacture or supply for us. They are parts of our character that flow freely when we have been with Jesus and dry up when we've not. It's really that simple. And unfortunately there are no shortcuts. Jesus in Mark 11 stopped the merchants from using the temple as a shortcut, and how often we have taken whatever shortcut we could to have our fill of Jesus and still have the world as well. The church is filled with people who bought the lie that being a Christian means speaking some words, signing a card, raising your hand, maybe walking up to the front of the church. There's no doubt that many believers begin their journey that way but far too many -- for far too many that is a description of the beginning, middle, and the end of our Christian lives. They live lives with no fruit. Jesus took rough self-centered fishermen who had really no sense of self-control at all, and he turned them into people who

lived to bear that kind of fruit. Peter showed what happens when Jesus takes over your life. He was told by the rulers to stop preaching Jesus, and he said this in Acts 14, he said: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. May I suggest to you that if no one has ever known that you've been with Jesus, perhaps it's because you never have.

So how do I know that I'm one of his? Well, Jesus made it clear in Matthew 7:16, he said this, he said: "You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." Fruit bearing is the proof that we belong to Him. And if these fruits are not growing in your life, an alarm should be going off in your spirit, because fruitless trees are cut down and thrown into the fire. There's nothing more terrifying than the very next words Jesus uttered in Matthew 7:21. He says this: "Not everyone who says to

*me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

Okay. So how do I grow self-control and all of the other fruits? Well, the solution is not a grocery list of things that good Christians do: Here's what you have to do, just do these things. It's not in submitting my will, my own determination to be a good Christian. Trust me, you do not have the strength to pull that off. God showed us that through Paul. In Romans 7:18 Paul said this: *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* Paul speaks for all of us, he says we all have the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out. You see, desire alone is not enough. Desire under the control of the Holy Spirit is more than enough. And self-control is precisely that. And you get self-control by abiding in Jesus. If you are one of his, this is what God will produce in you. It is simply a desire to be like Jesus. And to get it, all you have to do is ask. Ask God for a heart that



longs to be under the control of God's Holy Spirit. You know, if it's never been your desire, ask yourself if you haven't just taken the temple shortcut that leads nowhere. Just cry out to God like David did in *Psalm 51: Create in me in clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* You know, David asked God for a brand new heart, one that would desire what God desires. We are free to ask that as well. We are desire driven creatures, and God delights in putting those desires under the Holy Spirit's control. That's what self-control is, and again, here's how you get it. Like I said at the beginning, the principle: *Romans 8: And we know all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.* The technique: *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.* The method: *Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*

You see, God wants nothing more than to shape and mold our desires into the very image of his Son, and the way to do that is simply to ask. Listen to what God says in *Psalm 37.* He says: *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Just think of what God's saying here! God says seek after his control of your desires and he'll give you those desires of your heart. He says expect the highest satisfaction you can want

to come from Him alone, and God promises you will get it. That's the key to self-control. Let's pray.

*Father God, I do thank you that it is all done and all accomplished by you at the cross, that there's nothing that we can do to add to that in the slightest. Father, all we need to do is ask. Lord, I repeat the prayer that I repeat almost daily, I pray again and again and again, Lord, give me a heart that wants nothing more than to see You high and lifted up. Grant me that, Lord, acknowledging that that's not my heart. My heart wants to see me high and lifted up. Father, I just thank you that we can come before you honestly and pray the prayer that would enable your Spirit to have control of our spirit, to give us the gift of self-control as we abide in your Son. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*