

Week 12: Self-Discipline

“By constant self-discipline and self-control you can develop greatness of character.” (Grenville Kleiser)

Self-Control

Heaven will be filled with only one kind of person: the kind that so desperately wanted to get there that he absolutely would not be denied.

No one will accidentally get to Heaven. No one will just happen upon it one day, having gone out for a leisurely walk down the path of life with no apparent destination in mind. No one will have the wrong address and mistakenly knock on Heaven's gate.

No one will just end up there.

This is because we live in a sin-stricken world. As a result, we are bombarded by temptations that constantly distract us from the path to Heaven. Because of this, few people will get there. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Heaven is reserved only for those who have developed the self-control to get there.

Living Without Self-Control...

...is like letting all of your defenses down and begging to be overrun by the world. It's like throwing the front door of your life wide open and saying to Satan, "Come on in!"

"Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit." (Proverbs 25:28, NASB)

Living *with* self-control, on the other hand, makes a man better "than he who captures a city." (Proverbs 16:32, NASB)

An Expectation

Self-control is a fruit of God's own spirit (Galatians 5:23).

Thus, it should be no surprise that God commands His people to infuse it into their characters as well:

“...Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge *self-control*...” (2 Peter 1:5-6, NKJV)

As Paul wrote to Titus, God teaches us that “...denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...” (Titus 2:12, NKJV).

Two Components Of Self-Control

Because of the importance of self-control in the life of a Christian, we will spend our last two lessons exploring this topic.

In this lesson, we will look at self-discipline, which is one component of self-control, and in the final lesson, we will look at moderation.

Self-Discipline

Jim Rohn once said that, “Everyone must choose one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret.”

He was exactly right.

We cannot escape that choice. Either we will subject ourselves to the rigors of developing a disciplined life or we will suffer the true pain of having *not* developed a disciplined life.

If godliness is our goal, self-discipline is a requirement.

The Steps Of Self-Discipline

Self-discipline is achieved by doing three things:

1. Training our intellect. The first step toward a life of self-discipline is to gain knowledge. One cannot discipline himself unless he knows he needs to.

“...Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue *knowledge*...” (2 Peter 1:5, NKJV)

As Christians, we recognize that the knowledge we must seek is the knowledge that comes from God...the knowledge of *truth*:

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the *knowledge of the truth*.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4, NASB)

In our quest for knowledge, though, we must guard against that which deceptively masquerades as truth:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in *real knowledge* and all discernment...” (Philippians 1:9, NASB)

This is imperative, because the knowledge of the world will fill our minds with nothing of substance. If we pursue this intellectual cotton candy, we’ll be “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7, NASB).

We must also avoid deceiving ourselves into believing that mere enthusiasm for seeking knowledge is equal to actually having knowledge:

“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but *not according to knowledge*...” (Romans 10:2, NKJV)

2. Conforming our will to our intellect. The second step in achieving a life of self-discipline is to harmonize one’s will with the knowledge he has acquired.

Assuming that the knowledge one has gained is the knowledge of truth (knowledge from God), this step will orient a person toward the right path.

Gaining the knowledge is finding out which path is right. Conforming one’s will to that knowledge is moving onto that correct path.

If the acquired knowledge is not the knowledge of truth, conforming one’s will to that errant knowledge will only compound the existing problem. As Stephen Covey said, “If your ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step you take gets you to the wrong place faster.”

Step 1 is about discovering God’s will. Step 2 is about choosing to make His will our will.

3. Subjugating our thoughts and actions to our will. The final step in achieving a life of self-discipline is to enslave one’s mental and physical activities to his will. It’s deciding that one’s willpower, and not his passions, will be the master.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Give some Bible examples of self-control/self-discipline.

2. Give some Bible examples of a lack of self-control/self-discipline.

3. The words “discipline” and “disciple” are closely related. What does the concept of being a disciple tell us about the concept of self-discipline?

4. What are some practical ways that we can train ourselves to be self-disciplined?

5. Can a person be self-disciplined in worldly matters without being self-disciplined in spiritual matters? What about the other way around? Are both necessary in the life of a Christian?

Week 13: Moderation

“The heart is great which shows moderation in the midst of prosperity.” (Seneca)

In the previous lesson, we began to explore the subject of self-control, as we took a look at its first major component: self-discipline. This week, we finish our exploration of the topic by considering the second major component of self-control: moderation.

Though the common phrase “moderation in all things” is never found in the Bible, God certainly addresses the topic in such a way that we’re well within the bounds of Scripture to suggest that Christians ought to be people of moderation.

At the very least, we can *rule out* Oscar Wilde’s notion that moderation is a fatal thing. His conclusion that nothing succeeds like excess seems to be the antithesis to God’s proclamations on Christians living.

The Two Kinds of Moderation

Scripture addresses two distinct kinds of moderation, both of which it commands Christians to engage in:

Avoidance Of Excess

The first kind of moderation is the most obvious kind: *avoidance of excess*.

Though the Bible never uses the phrase “moderation in all things,” it does key in on a few specific examples. This seems to establish the general principle of a godly life excluding excess:

In Ephesians 5:18, the NKJV reads: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation..”

The word translated “dissipation” is the Greek word *asotia*, which carries the literal meaning of profligacy, prodigality, riot, and excess. Given that context, the King James actually renders it: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is *excess*...”

Similarly, Richard Weymouth translates the verse: “Do not indulge in much wine--a thing in which excess is so easy...”

The point is that we should avoid excess, because in this particular case, it literally impairs one's mind.

Though wine/strong drink are often used in Scriptural condemnation of excess, the general principle is stated in other contexts as well:

Proverbs 25:27 warns that "It is not good to eat much honey..."

One could even make the argument that Paul's admonition to women regarding *modesty* (1 Timothy 2:9-10) carries an implicit directive to avoid aesthetic excess.

The underlying concept driving all of these passages is that a godly person is a person of self-control, and a person of self-control is a person who recognizes the inherent dangers of excess.

Thus, the godly person is content to be moderate in his pursuit and consumption of this world's blessings.

Constant Self-Examination

The second kind of moderation that Scripture commands Christians to demonstrate is one of reflection, examination, and adjustment.

We should not only be moderate in our living, we should be moderators of our living.

The easiest way to grasp this concept is to think of a "moderator" in a debate. He's the individual charged with keeping the event flowing forward and the debaters on topic. To achieve this, he must cut some of the debaters' comments short, redirect them at times, etc. He closely observes what's happening and makes adjustments as needed.

Scripture commands us to do this with our own lives:

"But a man must *examine himself*, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:28, NASB)

"*Examine yourselves* as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." (2 Corinthians 13:5, NKJV)

"But each one must *examine his own work*..." (Galatians 6:4, NASB)

As the prophet Jeremiah wailed over Jerusalem, he proclaimed, "Let us *examine and probe our ways*, and let us return to the Lord" (Lamentations 3:40, NASB)

Godliness does not happen by accident. One must constantly look in the mirror and adjust as necessary.

A Final Word

In many ways, every subject that we have explored over the last 13 weeks comes down to the issue of self-control. When we firmly root our lives in habits of self-discipline and moderation, we will be well on our way to living virtuously.

The life of a Christian is not a life of perfection. Rather, it is a life of well-intentioned effort aided by the grace of God.

Pursuing a life of virtue can be wearisome and, at times, even discouraging. When the world is floating downstream, we sometimes wonder whether swimming upstream is worth it.

On those days when the pressures of the world seem insurmountable, let us not forget that without pressure and heat, carbon is never turned into diamonds.

Struggling against a world of sin and entering through the narrow gate is indeed worth it:

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:17, NKJV)

May God bless you as you continue to pursue a life of virtue.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why is excess so dangerous in the life of a Christian?
2. Is there any area of life in which excess is acceptable? If so, give some Scriptures to back up your claim.
3. How can we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5)?
4. Where is the line between moderation and excess? How do we determine that line?
5. Is the line between moderation and excess different for each individual or is it the same for everyone?