

GET A GRIP! (Self-Control - 2 Peter 1:6) – Sunday, July 19, 2009 – Summit EFC

Series: *Know to Grow* (2 Peter 1:1-11), Message #6 – Pastor Doug Corlew

Song: **Be Lifted High** – *And I fall to my knees so it's You that they see, not I. Jesus, You be lifted high.*
Would you like for Jesus Christ to be lifted high in your life?

Then turn in your Bible to **2 Peter 1:3-6a** - *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control.*

This summer I hope you're making every effort with me to supplement your faith with these Christ-like character qualities. One thing leads to another, you know, as you ascend this ladder toward Christian maturity – so that your development of virtue leads to an increase in knowledge, which enables you to practice more self-control... and onward and upward it goes. But this morning I'd like us to focus on this third quality: *Self-control*. What is it? Do you have it? What does it look like? What does it not look like?

Maybe you saw the video from a couple summers ago, when a minor league baseball manager (Phillip Wellman... or is it PK?) had a total meltdown after being ejected from a game for arguing a call. Remember this? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePi2-nE8L2w>

That guy needs to get a grip, doesn't he? I think we'd all agree that the coach was behaving like a two-year old. We'd say, "He needs to grow up and practice a little self-control!"

I mean, if you're the parent of a toddler, you may see behavior like this up close every day in your home, or even in public places, unfortunately! When children don't get what they want, they are capable of some nasty temper tantrums, aren't they? However, if you can just be patient until they become teenagers, you won't have to worry anymore about that kind of emotional turbulence, right? Ha.

In his book Preparing for Adolescence, **James Dobson** points out that self-control can also be very difficult for teenagers because they *feel* everything more intensely than adults. Little things that won't bother you so much later in life will really bug you as a teenager. That's why teenagers can sometimes be so explosive, doing things without thinking, then regretting their behavior later.

But as we mature, we're supposed to get a grip on life. So have you gotten a grip yet? If we're honest, we would probably all admit that, given the right circumstances, we are also capable of a major meltdown, not so much different from the coach in the video. Can you remember a time when you lost control, saying or doing some things that would be a huge embarrassment to you, if it was captured on camera for all of us to see now? It's easy to be controlled by our passions –

But to be self-controlled is to control our passions instead. To rule *over* your desires and emotions, rather than to be ruled *by* your desires and emotions. It means saying no to something when you should say no, and practicing moderation when it comes to legitimate desires and activities.

Very simply, the self-controlled person is able to govern himself. And the ability to do that is a key indicator of maturity, not just as a Christian, but as a human being. The ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle also identified self-control as a key mark of maturity – exercising restraint, keeping in check all sorts of animal instincts and primitive urges.

When self-controlled, you make appropriate decisions and you respond to stressful situations in ways that yield positive results. So teaching self-control to our kids is one of the greatest favors we can do for them. But first, we may have to learn it ourselves. So what does a self-controlled person look like?

1st of all, Scripture does teach that a self-controlled person is **SLOW TO ANGER**. Let's look at some wisdom from the book of **Proverbs** for those who struggle with a hot temper or a short fuse.

Proverbs 29:11 says, *A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.* How would you be described then, by the people who know you best – as a fool or a wise man? Do you give full vent to your spirit, or do you quietly hold it back?

Many Christians show a lack of self-control in this area. They are easily irritated and have little control over their emotions, easily flying off the handle. Unfortunately, these outbursts of anger are frequently directed toward one's own family members, who may not even be the real source of the aggravation.

Or how about **Proverbs 16:32** - *Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.* To explode in a rage that intimidates others is no display of strength. That's a sure sign of weakness. The strong man or woman is the one who is slow to anger, ruling his or her own spirit. To rule your spirit is to be in control of your self. Can you rule over your own spirit?

The corollary of this statement is **Proverbs 25:28**. Let's go there, shall we? It says, *A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.* In Biblical times, a city's walls were its chief means of defense. If the walls were breached, an invading army could pour into the city and conquer it.

In the same way, a person without self-control is vulnerable to all kinds of temptations. And in the New Testament, self-control is most often associated with overcoming sexual temptation.

A self-controlled person then, is also **SEXUALLY PURE**. Unfortunately, Solomon, who wrote the book of Proverbs, is a sad but striking example of his own words. Because Solomon disregarded his own wisdom and he let his passions run out of control. He gave free reign to his desires. As an extremely wealthy king, Solomon had access to everything he might desire. And that can be a dangerous thing.

The Scriptures record that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, all from nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel that they should not take wives. Solomon learned a painful lesson from his self-indulgence, namely:

You can choose your sins, but you can't choose your consequences. Solomon paid a heavy price for his lack of self-control. His wives turned his heart away from God. Because of that, God divided Solomon's kingdom in the days of his son Rehoboam, and the Davidic dynasty was crippled from that day forward. Solomon wouldn't have chosen those consequences, but Scripture says we reap exactly what we sow.

South Carolina Governor **Mark Sanford** is learning the same lesson today. He's a Christian man trying to pick up the pieces in his life after recently admitting to an extramarital affair. Like Solomon, Sanford was in a position of power; and like Solomon, Sanford believed the lie of Satan that he deserved better than what God had provided for him. The temptation isn't unique to people in power; in fact, every married person has faced this temptation. Commenting on the Sanford incident –

Columnist **Cal Thomas** writes, *Psychiatrists explain that married people tire of one another after 10 or 20 years, and that good marriages are the result of hard work. Forsaking all others is more than a wedding promise. It is a daily denial of one's lower instincts. Temptation is everywhere. The key to*

overcoming it is to realize you are fighting an adversarial force that wants to destroy you, embarrass you, and cause ridicule to be heaped on the God you claim to worship.

Thomas says he once asked **Billy Graham** if he experienced temptations of the flesh when he was young. He said, “Of course.” How did he deal with them? With passion the evangelist responded, “*I asked God to strike me dead before He ever allowed me to dishonor Him in that way.*” Thomas writes, *That is the kind of seriousness one needs to overcome the temptations of a corrupt culture in which shameful behavior is too often paraded in the streets.* It’s true, isn’t it?

Don’t expect a corrupt culture to encourage self-control. The culture tells us to fulfill our desires, to follow our heart, do what comes naturally, don’t tell yourself no. David and Solomon prove that sexual restraint has never been easy. But it’s got to be harder today than it was just 30 years ago, when you consider the illicit sexual content so common in movies and TV shows.

Or when you consider the convenience and secrecy of internet pornography. You don’t even have to go looking for porn anymore. It will find you. And if you do not have the self-control to say No to the pop-up teaser that appears on your screen, you are always just one click away from heading down a path of self-destruction. I believe porn is killing more marriages than we can imagine. We’ve got to be honest with each other in the church, so we can help each other overcome these addictions.

And we need to develop a biblical view of marriage. Turn with me to **1 Corinthians 7:5-9** where the apostle Paul acknowledges the struggle of sexual purity and reminds us of God’s wonderful gift of sex within the covenant of marriage. To those who are married, he writes,

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.

9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. Better to marry – not to become sexually active; not to move in together. You can abstain, you know. You’re not a farm animal; with God’s help, you can control your passions. But if sexual abstinence seems too great a burden for you to bear, then there is a solution provided by the Lord. Get married. Enjoy fully what God has designed for a husband and wife. And stay devoted to your spouse.

For the Bible says, *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (Hebrews 13:4).* Scripture also teaches that –

A self-controlled person will be **MODESTLY DRESSED**. Please turn to **1 Timothy 2** for some words which are specifically addressed to the women. Paul writes in v **9-10**, *that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.*

Now folks, Paul is not saying it’s wrong to dress nicely and look attractive. He’s simply calling women to use good judgment and modesty when they dress, to emphasize their deeds of service rather than their outward appearance. The way we dress says much about our values, and modesty is one way that we say “no” to the idols of physical perfection and sex that are worshiped so much in our culture.

Just look around and you'll see that we live in a society where 10 and 12 year old girls look through fashion magazines, use 20 kinds of lip gloss, and have closets full of expensive clothes, shoes, and handbags. Newsweek magazine recently did a story about this: how girls are becoming obsessed with hair, make-up, clothing, and body image at earlier and earlier ages.

Meanwhile, we parents may be sending the wrong message to our children by fretting over our own physical appearance. And of course, we don't want to see our kids lacking anything, so we over-indulge them in these desires. But how are our kids going to say no to themselves if we can't even say no to them?

Of course, when we talk about controlling our desires, the Word of God would also have us consider our habits of eating and drinking. And while the Bible says, *Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink* (Col. 2:16), it also urges us to be **DISCERNING** when it comes to **FOOD & DRINK**. All of us get hungry and thirsty, so it's important to know when to abstain and when to use moderation.

Proverbs 23:20-21 warns, *Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty.*

When we talk about gluttony, let me say right away that we are not singling out those who have a so-called "weight problem." That may or may not be due to a lack of self-control. There are some people who are very self-controlled about their diet, yet still struggle with their weight. And by the same token, some who never gain weight do fail to exercise any self-control in their eating and drinking.

The question is: Do you always give in to your desires for certain foods and drinks? I mean, would a self-controlled person really drink twelve cans of pop or ten cups of coffee every day, or eat two dishes of ice cream every night? Those things might seem relatively harmless, but if we continually indulge our physical appetites, we may find that our self-control is greatly weakened in other areas as well.

Scripture calls us to sometimes fast when we pray. But we hate to fast, because we don't want to deny ourselves food. And so we never learn how fasting can be a valuable discipline in our lives that not only helps to sharpen our spiritual sensitivities, but also helps us develop self-control.

When it comes to food and drink, Paul agrees with Peter, that knowledge should lead to self-control. Remember last week when we looked at **1 Corinthians 8:1** and saw that *knowledge puffs up*? In the context, Paul is talking about the knowledge that meat offered to idols in pagan worship services is really harmless for a Christian to eat. But that was a controversial issue of the day. Christians were divided on this one, and some believers were flaunting their freedom, proud of their knowledge.

But, Paul urges, take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Cor 8:9-13)

A passage like this can be applied in so many situations today. I mentioned that self-control sometimes means abstinence and sometimes means moderation. So which should it be when it comes to alcohol?

Should we vote?! I realize that among Christians today there is disagreement on this issue. Where do I stand? Glad you asked! Here's my position: The Bible clearly forbids drunkenness, and while it does not *require* total abstinence, it does *recommend* it as the highest and best course for your life.

Proverbs 20:1 warns, *Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise (20:1)*. And **Proverbs 23** asks, *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. (v 29-33)*

We all know there are serious dangers associated with alcohol. Alcohol is a mind altering drug, and studies show that the symptoms of intoxication do in fact begin with the very first drink. And particularly in our culture, where alcohol destroys countless lives and families – and since others are watching me, most importantly my children, who are sure to be influenced by my example –

I will not even consider having a drink of alcohol. My conscience simply will not allow it. I would encourage you to choose the path of abstinence also. Trust me, you don't need alcohol to have a good time. But this is my personal conviction and I do not stand in judgment upon those who may think differently. Regardless of our convictions, let's be discerning and practice self-control in this area.

And how about personal finances? Do you demonstrate self-control here? Are you **FINANCIALLY CONTENT** or are you driven by the desire to get rich? With the money that you have, do you spend impulsively and extravagantly, or do you live more simply so that you can be generous to others?

The spiritually mature person is able to say with Paul, *I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (Phil. 4:11)*. But the average American apparently can't say that, because the average American household has a credit card debt of \$7,000.

Undoubtedly, there are times when people get into that kind of debt because of an emergency situation. But if the *average* debt is \$7,000, then we are obviously spending beyond our means. We are indulging our desires for whatever we want: new clothes, new cars, expensive vacations. If we don't have the money, we charge it and worry about it later. Because we don't want to tell ourselves No!

But it's not just those in debt who fail to exercise self-control. Many affluent people, including some Christians, indulge themselves in whatever their hearts desire.

They are like Solomon who said in **Ecclesiastes 2:10**, *Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. Indulging in whatever my heart desires, even if I can easily afford it, is not the way to gain self-control.*

So are you getting tired of this sermon yet? This sermon is no fun, is it?! We don't like to tell ourselves no. We like green lights, we hate red lights, because we don't like to stop. We don't want to get a grip on ourselves. In a recent issue of the journal Psychological Science, I was surprised that even researchers from Yale University stated, *"Apparently, it's human nature to be out of control."*

Turn to **Acts 24** and you'll see a vivid illustration of this, as Paul is given an opportunity to share the Gospel with a Roman governor. In **v 24-26**, Felix and his wife *sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."*

I don't think Felix wanted to hear this message, do you? The powerful governor didn't like having someone preach to him about self-restraint! But I do find it interesting that Paul would talk about self-control in his witnessing. I don't think self-control is covered in the Four Spiritual Laws or Steps to Peace with God, is it? You don't see it mentioned in many gospel tracts.

But before anyone can get saved they must know they are lost. Before the good news can be appreciated, you have to grasp the bad news. The bad news is that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We fail to keep His righteous laws and so we stand guilty under the righteous judgment of our Creator.

And as Paul reasoned about righteousness and warned of the coming judgment, apparently he used the topic of self-control as an illustration of our need for Jesus Christ. Our lack of self-control is one obvious proof that our own righteousness will be seriously deficient when we stand before a holy God.

That's why we need a Savior. Jesus Christ is the only one who ever lived a life of perfect self-control. He obeyed God fully, ruling over his passions, saying No to sin and yes to the will of His Father in every situation. And His self-control was never more evident than when He resisted the human urge to avoid suffering. He said No to His desire for comfort and ease, and He embraced the cross for our salvation.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.
(1 Peter 2:22-24)

Christ died for our sins, that we might be delivered from its penalty *and* from its power. This is your destiny as a Christian! The chains of sin are broken!

You see, the New Testament writers viewed self-control differently from the Greek philosophers, because for the apostles, self-control was not a matter of natural will-power.

We all know there are plenty of unbelievers who are able to exercise self-control in specific areas of life for the purpose of achieving some goal. But in other areas, they may live with little or no self-control. For example, an athlete may be strict in his diet, but show no control of his temper or his lust. Biblical self-control though, covers every area of your life, and is not achieved through one's own will power.

In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul writes that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

It's the Holy Spirit at work in the life of a Christian that enables us to live a life of moderation and discipline. You see, the power of temptation is much stronger than any commitment that you can make. You must be born again. You need the life of God within you to live a life pleasing to Him. But if you *have* been born again, then a new way of living really is available to you, as an ordinary Christian.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control (v 5-6). God has put you in a position where you *can* say no to sin. Your Enemy will tell you that you can't do this. Don't listen to him. You can, by the power of Christ in you!

That's why we should make every effort. Because we can change. We can take every thought and make it obedient to Christ. We can train our tongues to speak words that edify rather than tear down. We do not have to be controlled by our passions any longer; we can rule over our desires as we yield to the Spirit!

This morning, as we come to the Lord's Table, I invite you to bow with me in prayer... Let's pause for a few moments to examine our lives as those who are serving take their places and the worship team comes. By eating the bread and drinking the cup, we give thanks for the body and blood of Jesus, broken for us, and shed for us, *that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.*

If you will repent of your sin and put your trust in Him, God has promised that He would save you from sin's penalty and power, giving you new life through His Spirit. Would you repent and believe in Christ even now as we meditate in His presence? Today can be the day of your salvation!

If this new life is yours through faith in the Son of God, who suffered and died in your place – then we hope you will share in this time of communion with us. Please remain seated while we serve you, and retain both the bread and the cup until all are served, then we will eat and drink together.