**SELF-CONTROL**

Review:

Last time, we talked about our emotions. Our culture believes the lies, “What I feel must be real” and “I can’t control my response to my emotions.” We said that we don’t respond to the situation but our interpretation of the situation. Therefore, your perspective on life and your desires will impact how you respond.

Introduction:

Tonight, we want to talk about self-control. Just because you feel a certain way does not mean that you can’t exercise self-control.

I. Definition of self-control

 A. Websters defines self-control as the ability to exercise the will so as to prevent oneself from expressing strong emotion or acting impulsively.

 B. A mom continually yells at her kids when she gets upset. She doesn’t want to yell at her kids but she tells herself that she can’t help it. So one day she is yelling at her kids and her cell phone rings and immediately she answers it and has her yelling under control.

 This illustration shows that she can exercise self-control given the right circumstances.

C. What are some other examples of someone exercising self-control that come to mind? (Dieting, getting up to go to school, doing your homework instead of watching tv all night, not being an impulsive shopper)

II. The importance of self-control

 A. Prov 25:28 says, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”

 B. What was the purpose of city walls in ancient Israel? They were the protection for the people from outside invaders & enemies.

 C. Do you realize how vulnerable you are if you can’t control yourself?

 D. How does self-control bring you protection?

 1. I knew a man who had been on vacation for a week, and when he came back to work, his boss started to give him a hard time. He started to push his buttons – those areas that he tended to be sensitive about – and that got him easily angered. As a result, he lost self-control, yelled at his boss, and quit his job. As I talked to him about that a few weeks after, he was regretful that he did not exercise self-control and was unemployed.

 2. If you do not have self-control, you are an easy target.

 3. If you do not have self-control, you are vulnerable.

 a. To angry outbursts

“A quick-tempered person does foolish things, and the one who devises evil schemes is hated.” Prov 14:17

 b. To temptation

**“**So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Gal 5:16, 5:23

 c. To even good things that can have the power to enslave you (eating – >gluttony, rest –> laziness, talking –> gossip.

III. Learning how to exercise self-control

 A. In Titus 2, Paul tells them over and over that they need self-control.

Titus 2:1-8

“You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. **2**Teach the **older men** to be temperate, worthy of respect, **self-controlled**, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

**3**Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. **4**Then they can urge the **younger women** to love their husbands and children, **5**to be **self-controlled** and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

**6**Similarly, encourage the **young men** to be **self-controlled**. **7**In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness **8**and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

 1. Older men (2:2)

 2. Younger women (2:3-5)

 3. Young men (2:6-8)

 B. How does Paul say they can learn self-control?

Titus 2:11-14.

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. **12**It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and **to live self-controlled**, upright and godly lives in this present age, **13**while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, **14**who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

 1. In verse 12, what is it that teaches them to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly possessions and to live self-controlled, upright & godly lives? (It is God’s grace. 2:11)

 2. How does God’s grace help us to develop self-control?

 a. The grace of salvation gives us something we do not deserve.

 (1). It gives us forgiveness of sins.

 (2). It brings us into a relationship with God as His children.

 (3). It expresses an unconditional love to us that impacts our motivation. We now have someone greater to live for than just ourselves. We want to live to please God.

 (4). Why does an Olympic athlete willingly exercise self-control for 4 years and not eat chocolate? It is because they have something greater they are living for that motivates them. They willingly make that sacrifice because in comparison to winning a gold medal, it is not even a sacrifice in their minds.

 (5). When we grasp a hold of our utter hopelessness apart from Christ and grasp how amazing God’s grace is toward us, it motivates us to live for something greater. It motivates us to want to please God with our lives.

Read Titus 2:9-10.

“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, **10**and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will **make the teaching about God our Savior attractive**.”

 (6). God’s grace has given us something that is so much greater than things of this world. It gives us a greater hope.

 Titus 2:13-15.

“While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, **14**who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**15**These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.”

 (7). God’s grace promises to us eternal life with Christ.

 (8). No one is willing to make a sacrifice now if they do not see something greater to come. Are you willing to exercise self-control now to please God because your relationship with Him means more to you than some immediate desire?

 b. God’s grace not only promises us salvation to those who trust in Christ; it also empowers us to be able to exercise self-control.

 (1). At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit indwells you. Part of the reason for that is to empower you to live the life that God has called you to.

 (2). Another definition of grace is God’s special enablement to help us.

 (3). The same Spirit that empowered Jesus to raise from the dead is within you to empower you to live. (Rom 8:11-14)

 (4). That is why in Gal 5:23, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. As we spend time in God’s Word, prayer and obey God, the Spirit of God will help us grow in self-control.

 C. In I Thess 4, Paul applies this issue of self-control to sexual purity.

 Read I Thess 4:3-7.

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; **4**that each of you **should learn to control your own body** in a way that is holy and honorable, **5**not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; **6**and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. **7**For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

 1. Paul says to avoid sexual immorality, which is God’s will for us, we need to learn how to control our own bodies.

 2. He says the heathen who do not follow God just give in to their passionate lusts – “If it feels good then do it.”

 3. God gives us a different standard.

 4. He takes this so seriously that in 4:6, He says, “No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.”

 5. What Paul is getting at is that we need to be careful to exercise self-control over our own bodies so that we do not arouse sexual desires that would be inappropriate to arouse but that we also have a responsibility to not arouse sexual desires in another because of our behavior. That is what He means when He says, “We should not wrong a brother/sister or take advantage of them.”

6. To practically do this means that you need to set personal dating standards to help you exercise appropriate self-control so you are not arousing sexual desires prematurely, and you also know the dating standards of your date so you are not wronging them (defrauding) in this area.

IV. Practical steps to developing self-control

 A. Internal heart change

 1. We have already talked about the grace of God impacting your heart’s desires wanting to please God.

 2. When the desire to please God is greater than the desire to indulge self, you will be able to begin to develop self-control. (2 Cor. 5:9)

John 5:30

“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, **for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”**

 B. External steps

 1. Learn to plan ahead

 a. If you know you are placing yourself in a situation that tends to tempt you to lose self-control, plan accordingly. (I Peter 1:13-16) Prepare your heart & mind in advance.

 b. If you are going on a date, plan what you are going to do on the date in advance.

 c. Establish your dating standards in advance.

 d. Know what you are going to do if someone starts to push on your dating standards.

 2. Make yourself accountable to others in the areas you struggle to have self-control.

 a. 2 Tim 2:22: “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue…along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

 b. God has given you others to help you learn self-control.

 c. Be open to your parents’ counsel & questioning.

 d. This requires humility & a teachable spirit, but if you really want to grow in self-control, you will welcome it.

 3. You need to allow all your life to be under the control of God. (Rom 6:16)

 a. You are fooling yourself if you think you can exercise self-control in these areas but not in some other areas. It is an interesting thing that when you exercise discipline in one area of life that it often helps to exercise discipline in other areas.

 For example, when I am on vacation and have more down time, it is often more difficult to practice a consistent quiet time.

 b. Back to the picture we started this lesson with: if the wall is around 85% of the city but 15% of the wall is broken down, then you are vulnerable to attack and will be defeated.

Conclusion:

Learning to exercise self-control is an important character quality. Without it, you will be vulnerable to temptation and the attacks of others and will not respond well.

Allow God’s love & grace to motivate you to live to please God and grow in self-control. What you give up in the short term will be more than rewarded by God in the long term.

I Cor 9:25

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

Application:

Is there an area that you have been struggling with exercising self-control? If so, admit it to God, repent of it and begin to take steps to grow in that area. He will forgive you and help you if you will turn to Him.

Small group questions:

1. In what area do you struggle with self-control?

2. How do sexual sins pose difficulty for you to exercise self-control?

3. What steps have you taken to grow in exercising self-control?

4. What further steps do you need to take as a result of this lesson?

5. How can God’s grace help you grow in this area of self-control?