

Living by the Spirit

The Virtue of Self-Control

© 2016 Mark Beaird

Text: Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Introduction

Living in the Spirit is made possible by the “fruit of the Spirit” or by the result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the Greek, the term “fruit of the Spirit” could also be translated the “harvest of the Spirit.” It is an expression of what is produced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as we allow Him to work and produce spiritual growth within us.

Today we consider the aspect of temperance or self-control.

Former President Harry S Truman once said, “In reading the lives of great men, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves... self-discipline with all of them came first.” <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/self-discipline.html>

Gary Ryan Blair had this to say on the subject, “Self-discipline is an act of cultivation. It requires you to connect today's actions to tomorrow's results. There's a season for sowing a season for reaping. Self-discipline helps you know which is which.”
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/self-discipline.html>

In secular Greek the noun translated here as "self-control" occurs quite frequently as do the verb "exercise self-control" and the adjective "self-controlled." All three are derived from a root meaning "strength." Their common thought involves that of a person's self-mastery that keeps him from being tempted or drawn away by any enticement, or anything that would divert him from his goal.
<https://bible.org/article/fruit-spirit>

The longer we live the more we will see the need for God's help in this area of life and the more clearly we will see the reasons why the Holy Spirit provides the strength to master ourselves. Note the **ways** the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to find and cultivate self-control or self-discipline.

I. Self-control Enables the Christian to Live a Disciplined Life.

A. The Holy Spirit enables us to maintain our focus on the goal.

2 Timothy 2:4-6, “No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. **5** Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.” NIV

B. The Holy Spirit enables us to maintain our commitment.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27, “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. **26** Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. **27** No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

II. Self-control Enables the Christian to Adhere to God’s Standard.

A. The Holy Spirit enables us to make choices that glorify God.

Note the Apostle Paul’s standard for making decisions found in **1 Corinthians 10:23-24 when he writes**, “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. **24** No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

In other words...

1. Is it helpful?
2. Is it constructive?
3. Can it be done for the glory of God?

B. The Holy Spirit enables us to live a life pleasing to God.

Conclusion

In the 1996 summer Olympics, American sprinter Michael Johnson set records in the 200- and 400- meter races. To do so he had trained for ten years to cut a mere second or two from his times.

He stated that success is found in much smaller portions than most people realize. A hundredth of a second here or sometimes a tenth there can determine the fastest man in the world. At times we live our lives on a paper-thin edge that barely separates greatness from mediocrity and success from failure.

Life is like being a sprinter: long stretches of hard work punctuated by brief moments in which we are given the opportunity to perform at our best.

The Christian life also resembles the life of a sprinter: long stretches of obedience and spiritual disciplines punctuated by great tests in which God gives us the opportunity to choose his eternal best (adapted from Craig Brian Larson’s 750 Engaging Illustrations. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002, p. 576).

Clearly we can see the reasons why the Holy Spirit provides the strength to master ourselves. The **ways** the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to find and cultivate self-control or self-discipline can and will help ensure a victorious Christian life.