

The Fruit of Self-Control

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To be like Christ. That should be our goal as believers. But becoming like Christ is neither easy, quick or natural. It is a goal that is impossible for us to achieve on our own. But we can become more like Christ through the power of God's Spirit within us. A continual and progressive transformation can take place in our lives, making us more and more like Christ, as we allow our minds to be renewed by the Word of God, and let the power of His Spirit work within us. Scripture sections such as Romans 12:1, 2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18) make this clear:

I beseech you, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (II Cor. 3:18).

Many of the character traits that show that we are becoming more like Christ can be found in Galatians 5:22, 23 where the "fruit of the Spirit" is described.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

This nine-fold fruit springs from our new nature (the gift of the Spirit) as we walk according to God's Word. The last Christ-like

character trait mentioned, self-control, is the focus of this article.

Many of the aspects of our Christian walk can be summed up in the concept of self-control. It is this virtue that gives us victory over worldly thinking and fleshly desires. Do I indulge my desires, appetites and emotions? Or do I walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:5, 12, 13), allowing God to work His good will in my life? Anyone, believer or unbeliever, can discipline his mind and body to obtain certain goals. Athletes do it all the time. But we as believers want more than temporary success in the earthly realm. We are after a spiritual and eternal prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Self-control is not an end in itself. It is a condition of the heart to seek God's will and not our own. The believer who is nourished by the written Word of God and is inspired by God's Spirit can manifest the fruit of the Spirit and realize self-control.

Two accounts in the Bible come to mind when I think of men of God who operated self-control. First, consider Paul in Acts 16:16-18.

Now it happened as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Imagine Paul being plagued by this girl for many days! The Greek word for "greatly annoyed" is also translated as grieved or greatly disturbed. I'm sure that Paul was itching to act. It would have been perfectly understandable, only human, for Paul to rebuke this girl much sooner than he did. But he waited. By the power

of God's Spirit within him he controlled his impulses and emotions and chose to wait for God's guidance. We can have this self-control also. We must believe that God will give us the knowledge and wisdom to handle any situation we are in. What freedom this brings to our lives! We no longer have to be slaves to our emotions. We can walk by the Spirit having God's divine love and power.

In the gospel of John (11:1-45) we have the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Verse six reads:

So, when He [Jesus] heard that he [Lazarus] was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

Verse 3 of John 11, told us that Jesus loved Lazarus. Jesus and Lazarus shared a deep and affectionate friendship. I'm sure that Jesus was

desperate to go and minister to Lazarus. But instead of running off to help his friend, he waited. Jesus must have truly trusted his Father. He knew that God's timing is always perfect. As a result of Jesus' obedience, an awesome demonstration of God's grace, love and power took place in Lazarus' being raised from the dead. And perhaps Jesus was comforted by this miracle as he looked toward the day when God would raise him up from the dead.

We also must learn to trust God like this and self-control is a major key to our success in doing so. Self-control is one of the greatest qualities that can characterize our lives. It is a powerful spiritual virtue that can help us become more like Christ.

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