

True Self-Control

A Life Committed to Pleasing God

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Given 10-Jan-15; Sermon #1248

Some of you may be familiar with a fairly famous psychological test that was done many years ago now, called the “Marshmallow test.” In the 1960s and 1970s there was a Stanford psychologist named, Dr. Walter Mischel, who conducted a series of experiments in which 653 preschool children were placed alone in a room that was furnished only with a small desk, and a chair. On the desk sat two marshmallows.

Now, you are probably thinking of the big marshmallows that you put on the end of a stick and roast over a fire, but I found out that Dr. Mitchell said that these were the little, teeny ones. I tell you this just to give you an idea of what these kids were facing.

Anyway, sometimes it was two marshmallows, but occasionally it was two pieces of candy, or a cookie or two small cookies, or some other treat like that.

Also on the desk beside the two marshmallows was a bell. You know, one of those bells that sit on the counter of a small business that you ring if you want to attract the owner's attention. They had one of those, and the two marshmallows.

The researcher who was there would tell the child that he had to leave, that he could not stay in the room with them, but that when he returned, the child could eat both marshmallows. Now, if the child wanted to eat only one marshmallow before he returned, then he could ring the bell, and eat that one marshmallow, but not both. He could only have one.

Then the researchers would shut the door and leave the child alone with the two forbidden marshmallows, and then they would watch what would happen.

Now, as expected, the children all reacted differently. None of these children were going to act the same way. Some, of course, rang the bell, and got their one marshmallow, and called it a day. They felt that one was just enough. (Now remember, these were the little itty-bitty ones.) Other children, the second the door was closed behind the researchers, gobbled the marshmallow down, and did not even bother ringing the bell. But about 30% of the children successfully delayed gratification until the researcher returned which was usually about 15 minutes later. So 30% of these kids had the willpower to wait 15 minutes to be gratified by those two little itty-bitty marshmallows.

Now of these kids—the 30%—you could tell (there was a one-way mirror) that they were really wrestling with the temptation. They wanted those marshmallows and they did not want to wait, but they knew that if they were going to get them, they would have to wait. So they did wait—somehow.

They found a way to resist. Some distracted themselves by just covering their eyes so they did not have to look at it. Other kids sang songs, talked to themselves, conducted mock conversations with their friends who were not there, and some just kicked the desk with their foot. Maybe it was the pain of their toe going into the furniture that made them distracted enough so that they did not think about the marshmallow. One resourceful little kid even curled up and took a nap while he waited.

Now what made the experiment somewhat famous is that years later in the 1980s, Dr. Mischel conducted follow up studies on 185 of these original children. This is in the 80s. These experiments have been done in the 60s and 70s so by now the kids were out of high school, in college, or actually in the work world. He wanted to find out how successful these kids had become, and if there was any kind of correlation between their ability to delay gratification and their ultimate outcomes as adults.

And he found that the children who rang the bell quickly, the ones that just gobbled it up and did not care, seemed to have, overall, more behavioral problems both in school and at home. He found that these kids, because of their behavioral problems, had lower SAT scores—scholastic achievement

test scores. They tended to struggle in stressful situations, they often had trouble paying attention, and they found it difficult to maintain friendships, and even found it difficult to maintain their waistlines.

On the other hand, those who had resisted temptation (part of the original 30% children), who remained in this group (now about 185 from the original children), turned out to be not only more fit and better socially adapted, but their SAT scores were as much as 210 points higher than the most impatient kids' scores.

Now, Dr. Mischel (who as of this writing is still alive, he is still a professor, still working at Columbia University), is studying these same test subjects and they are now in their 40s and 50s. He contributed to a 2011 brain imaging study of a small number of them (who he still had contact with) and it showed that between these two groups—those who could refrain and those who could not—there was actually differing brain activity that could be seen in those who are able to delay gratification, and those who could not. Those who delayed gratification used different parts of their brain while in these tests, suggesting that it is not an automatic response—it is not something that is ingrained in us from birth—but that it *is a conscious process*.

The kids who just automatically took the marshmallows without thinking about it were just going on response, like it was kind of an ingrained thing. But those who resisted, thought about it, used a different part of their brain to come to a conclusion not to eat the marshmallows.

Now, the study has had some detractors (actually quite a few); the psychological world out there was not convinced of Dr. Mischel's conclusions because, not necessarily that they disagreed with him, but they were concerned with the way the public—the common person—saw this study. The common person looked at this study, and said, “If my kid has self-control as a child, then he's going to be successful as an adult.” And Dr. Mitchell said, “No, that's not the conclusion of my study; that's not true.” Some of the kids who were impulsive actually turned out to be quite successful. And some of the kids who were delayed in their gratification about the marshmallow ended up not being successful. There was not a correlation there that can be said to be a conclusion. So, we should not look at it that way.

But when he began the study, Dr. Mischel wanted to understand, not whether this early delayed gratification was going to amount to a successful adult, but rather he wanted to find out how some children could delay gratification while the others could not. He really wanted to know about the mechanism, how it worked. What process did one person could go through to delay gratification; whereas the other person did not. He also wanted to know whether children could actually be taught to delay gratification, or even to delay longer at least a little longer than what they had naturally, or what they had been already taught by their parents.

He found out that if researchers gave children mental tools to distract them from what he called the hot stimulus of the marshmallow—that the marshmallow tasted really good—and help them to focus on cooler stimuli—more abstract thoughts that were pleasant to them—they would wait longer; that if he gave them something to figure out or something to work out in their minds while they were waiting, they would delay from the hot stimulus, and use the cold stimulus.

Now, hot stimuli are like the “devil on your shoulder” that tells you, “Go ahead, you can do it! Go ahead! Just jump right in there! The cool stimuli are like “the angel on the other shoulder” telling you, “I don’t think you should do that. You should think this through, take your time. This doesn’t have to be done right now.” So, the hot stimuli and the cool stimuli are warring against one another in most peoples’ minds that have a conscience.

Some children in this experiment supplied their own distractions. They provided their own cool stimuli in order to combat the hot one, and that would be like kicking the table, singing a song, doing something else other than looking at the marshmallow. Dr. Mischel learned that when the researcher would tell the child to think of the marshmallow as a cloud, sitting there on the desk, or as a cotton ball, and not as a marshmallow, think of them as something else abstracted in their own mind, that they were less likely to devour it before the researcher returned. So it was just the mental activity of thinking of something else instead of the marshmallow.

Now, ultimately, Dr. Mischel’s studies taught him that children who had a more accurate understanding of the workings of self-control, were better able

to delay gratification. That is, they were the ones who had some idea of what would make them give into the temptation. So, in understanding what would make them get in give in, they figured out ways to make sure that they did not give in. They worked it through in their minds that they had to do something in order to keep them from just jumping on those marshmallows and gobbling them down.

Realizing they would eat the marshmallows if they continue to look at it, they turned their chairs around, and looked at the wall instead. Or they focused on anything else in the room, you know little ball of dirt or something in the corner, or they made up a story to themselves to take up the time, or like the one boy did, he just simply went to sleep. So, they figured out they could control their desires by avoiding the temptation altogether by directing their thoughts in a different direction.

Obviously, we are getting to something here, and these kids were able—about 30% of them—to do something like this. Some of them might have just had a lot of willpower and they just willed themselves not to do it, but other kids had to work through some sort of process so that they would consciously not do it. They made themselves not do it by working themselves around this problem, by doing something else.

We are reaching a conclusion here—in this way, *self-control becomes an ability to direct the focus of our attention so that our decisions are not determined by the wrong thoughts.* Self-control can be **learned** if a person engages in a kind of mental transformation, if he starts to change his thoughts. So if we can change our thoughts—if we can change how we think about the thing—the temptation—then we can change our behavior. We can control our behavior, because we do not think about the thing that is attracting us in the same way that we did before, that gave us the urge to pursue it.

In the church, we call this process repentance. In Greek, that word is metanoia. It literally means, “changing of the mind.” It is God's process of changing our thinking toward everything.

We come into this world; we live in this world; we are constantly surrounded by human beings; we are constantly being bombarded by the attitudes of

Satan the Devil, and so we learn a way of thinking that is very contrary to the way God thinks. So with God's guidance, we go through a process throughout our whole lives of repentance, where we are trying to change our thoughts from what had been formed in us just by life, into godly thoughts—into the way God thinks.

And so God goes through this process—many years' worth—of trying to change our minds from the fleshly minds that we have into a godly mind that He has.

We could say then that real self-control is the fruit of a lifetime of repentance, because we are changing our thinking so that we will not do what we would normally carnally do, and therefore becoming more like God, controlling our behavior.

But this is getting ahead of the game.

I basically told you the end at the beginning, because I want to look at self-control from the Bible's point of view through the remainder of the sermon. I think it is already clear from what we have seen that learning self-control is a major long-term element in our success as Christians.

Turn to Galatians 5 where we have the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, and I will read this list again. I read it last time. We will read it once again.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [meekness], self-control. Against such there is no law.

Self-control ends the list that Paul gives as the fruit—the products—of the Spirit; God's Spirit working in us over time produces these fruits.

You may remember that in my last sermon (three weeks ago), I mentioned that some commentators believe that this position in the list, the final one that he mentioned, emphasizes its importance, or its difficulty, or its being the last virtue that most people tend to acquire. And I can see that it could indicate any of those, or all of those, because, granted, self-control is hard.

Just take a look at humanity. Look at people that you are around. Hopefully your family has a little bit more self-control than the normal run of the mill person, but you look out in the world and it becomes clear that self-control is actually a rarity among us. Most people seem to follow their desires willy-nilly. The only thing that seems to keep them from doing what they want to do is the police, or public ridicule, or whatever. But people tend to follow their desires and they will figure out a way to get what they want.

Now, the Greek word behind self-control is in *enkrateia*. It has been translated over the years as temperance (*King James Version*); others have self-restraint.

Let me go back to temperance just for just a moment. Temperance in 1611 meant self-control. But because of the way the language has drifted, semantic drift has occurred to temperance and temperance now means abstaining from alcohol and not necessarily being self-controlled or abstaining from *all* bad things.

Self-restraint was the next one. Then, continence, which most people would not use these days, because we always think of incontinence (unable to help yourself going to the bathroom), had a more sexual connotation back many centuries ago. And really, you could say that continence is a fairly good term here, because as we will find out, this *enkrateia* had a lot to do with sexual self-control.

The next one that I have here is control over desires. The Catholics (they are always good for one) just put in the word chastity, seeing that *enkrateia* had a lot to do with sexual things. So they just put chastity in there. That was from the *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

Here is one that is long. I think it is from the *Bible in Basic English*. They translated it as a whole phrase, “Able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.” That is a bit of an interpretation, but it is there at least on the dartboard.

By far, the choice among modern versions is self-control, because that is what Paul was really getting at—self-control.

Now, if you know anything about prefixes and root words, you could break *enkrateia* down: “en” which in Greek means “in” in English; and “kratei” which mean “power over,” or “lordship over.” This is the word that has come down to us in such words as democrat or autocrat—an autocrat is a person who has power of self; it is his own power if he is the one that is in power. A democrat is one who was given power by the people.

So, this idea of having power in—in power—shows you where it starts. You have the power inside. It is your “in” power; your lordship; you are in mastery. It is in here (yourself). It is inward. So you can see how the Greek mind was working. It is not power from the outside, it is not something that has been given to you, necessarily. But it is the power that comes from inside that allows you to control what you do. Power from within.

In classical Greek and then later Hellenism, *enkrateia* was normally used in connection with all human fleshly desires, (this is where continence comes in), that one had an ability, a power, a lordship, a mastery over these fleshly desires, whether it was food, or drink, or sex; whether you had a desire to use blasphemous words; whether you had a desire to gossip; you know, the use of speech; and power over desires to participate or watch entertainments.

So you can see how the Greeks were using it. They had the power from inside to avoid these things: excess food, excess drink, excess sex, excess of speech; and excess of entertainment. They had the power from within to control what they did with themselves.

Later on as you got into the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries of the modern era, Gnostics used the term to imply severe asceticism—that they were so controlled that they refrained and abstained from a host of these things. Many of them abstained from any kind of alcohol, and would not even drink very much water. They would abstain from food. Of course, they would abstain from sex. Some of them abstained from speaking. They abstained from all kinds of entertainments, and they eventually end up in monasteries, or similar, with vows of silence. And do you see where that might have come from?

Enkrateia is restraint; mastery of one's emotions, impulses, and desires; you have complete control over what your body does. So, a person displaying

enkrateia was one who did not allow himself to be tempted or diverted by any carnal fleshly allurements. It is a person of purpose; of single-mindedness; a person who had a goal that they were trying to reach; or a task that they were supposed to do; and they would not allow themselves to be diverted or distracted in any way from accomplishing that sort of thing, whatever it was that they were supposed to do.

To the philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, and others, it is the virtue of the free and independent man; a person who had no controls placed on him from the outside, but who freely controls all things from the inside, and who in self-restraint maintains his freedom in the face of all sorts of hedonistic pulls to the contrary.

So you can understand why this became understood as self-control. It was self-mastery; self-restraint; because it is *enkrateia*: The power over what is within, and it comes from within.

Please turn to Galatians 5 again, and this time to the previous verses to the works of the flesh, and we will find one of its antonyms—one of its opposites—and it is found at the end of verse 19:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness [KJV “licentiousness”], lewdness [KJV “lasciviousness”]

It could also be, “sensuality, indecency, promiscuity.” You get the idea.

You can see here why at some point the Greeks began to focus *enkrateia* on sexual sins, because this is where it showed itself best/worst/often; that the person who you knew was exhibiting *enkrateia* was one who abstained from promiscuity.

Now, it is very interesting that the book that contains this word—*enkrateia*—the most is I Corinthians.

Not this word here (Galatians 5:19). This word, here, is *aselgeia*. That is not important that you know that Greek term. But it is simply, as we see here, lewdness and promiscuity. But we know from my sermons in the past that

the Corinthians had a problem with sexual things and Paul had to deal with it there.

Now, a closer synonym for *enkrateia* is *akrates*. We will not go there, but II Timothy 3:3 talks about the things that will be going on at the end of the age, uses the phrase “without self-control.” And that is exactly what *akrates* means. The “a” at the beginning of that word gives a negative particle. It means, “not power over”—that they did not have power over themselves. It really means one without power, without inner strength, undisciplined, and uncontrolled.

Surprisingly, *enkrateia* occurs only seven times in the entire New Testament. And that is surprising because there are so many exhortations to abstain from sexual things, and to be self-controlled. But that word is not used very often.

But, in every case in which is used in the New Testament, you can see it refers to control over sexual sins, and it should be extended or expanded to include general self-control and discipline, because God is concerned with more than just whether we give in to sexual urges or not. He wants us to not give in to any kind of sin, any kind of temptation that will lead to sin. So we should not take it just in its sexual sense. We should take it in a sense of being controlled in every way to avoid sin or to overcome sin.

Thayer's Lexicon, I found, has a good general summary definition for *enkrateia*, and that is to, “exhibit self-government; to be able to display that you are in control of yourself; that you are governing yourself.”

Let us look at these other places where *enkrateia* is in the New Testament. We have seen one. We are going to go back to Acts 24. Here, Paul is before Felix.

Acts 24:24-25 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

When Paul started talking about righteousness and self-control, and that there was a coming judgment, Felix said, “Just stop right there. I will call you later if I want to talk.” Felix had a few problems. He did not want to hear about self-control.

Turn to II Peter 1. This is the third place where *enkrateia* is used in its noun form.

II Peter 1:5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

We see it there in verse 6 twice. Self-control is used twice. *Enkrateia* is underneath both of them. It is interesting here to look at these. I mean they really do not tell you a whole lot. They are just words in a list. And it might be difficult to see any kind of extra sense from it just by looking at it in the list.

But one thing we can do is look at them as Paul wrote them, and in the order he wrote them—the placement in the sentence. It does give us a little hint about how he was thinking and what he was considering *enkrateia* to mean to him.

So back in Acts 24:25, we see that it is placed in a three word pattern here: first is righteousness, second is self-control, and third is judgment.

And this is interesting to see because it follows righteousness. Righteousness comes first. Righteousness is what God gives to us. We could call it, His claims upon us; His laws; what He expects of us, and that sort of thing. So He gives that to us in a package. You could say that it is His Word. His Word is righteousness. And so we have what He expects of us in what He has taught.

Self-control comes next. And what does that mean? Well, it tells us—it indicates, or it alludes to the fact—that what we do with this righteousness is

important. So, self-control becomes the response to the righteousness. First you have what God gives, and then we have to react to it somehow. And the way we react to it is by practicing self-control.

It is interesting that the next word is judgment, which shows that Christ is going to judge us on how we respond or react to what He has given us. Is it not according to our works, that we will be judged? According to our works, and to our deeds?

So, we have been given righteousness. We need to respond in self-control. If we do, we will be judged justly and fairly as God's children in a good way. We are beginning to see something about self-control, here, that it is a response. It is a reaction.

The other one in II Peter is similar. What we have there is a list of virtues that we are supposed to add to our faith. So we start with faith, add virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Let us look at that one before self-control—knowledge. Knowledge is like the righteousness, is it not? It is what God has given us. He has given us certain knowledge that is above all other knowledge. And so what are we supposed to do? Our reaction to the knowledge that we have been given is to practice self-control! That is implied here, that our knowledge has to be put into practice.

What is the next word? The next word is perseverance. This tells us something about the self-control. It comes after knowledge. And, perseverance, which is *hupomone*—patient endurance—comes after the self-control. Once we learn self-control, we get this idea that it has to endure patiently over the long haul. We cannot just be self-controlled like this and be done with it. This is a self-control that has to last! It has to become ingrained as part of our character so that it lasts forever. And it is our self-control that is going to allow us to endure, to persevere, to be patient, and wait for Christ to come—whatever it is that we are enduring. Those who endure to the end will be saved.

These things are placed in order so that we come to understand certain things about it. So we have, in the first instance, righteousness; we respond to righteousness with self-control. And if we continue in self-control, we are going to come into judgment and the judgment will be good.

Another one here in II Peter. We start with knowledge and the knowledge then produces self-control; that we have to have self-control over the knowledge that we are learning and change our behavior. Then that behavior has to endure. And what does it endure to? Well, it produces godliness. And once we start acting like God, then we are truly showing the proper brotherly kindness, brotherly love, and of course the agape love that God wants to see in us.

So we can see a progression here of virtues or of states so that we are in the end brought into the God Family fully and have the character of God.

You can see how this worked, what Paul's state of mind was, what he was thinking about when he wrote this, so that we get the idea of what he was meaning by *enkrateia*—having self-control.

Turn to Titus 1. This is *enkrateia* as an adjective. The other three instances it was used as a noun. This time it is used as an adjective. We are also going to look at this in terms of a kind of stream of consciousness way that Paul was writing, that he was kind of free writing these virtues down and he put them in a specific order. He thought of one, and it brought to mind the next, and then the next, and then the next. This passage is about the qualifications of a bishop or overseer. Verse 7:

Titus 1:7-9 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

The three that we are looking at (but not necessarily going to look so much at the third one), is *holy* and then *self-controlled*. By the time he got to just and holy, the next thing he thought of was self-control.

There are two things that we could think about in terms of why he thought of self-controlled after holy. Those two things are: It could imply that holiness makes self-control possible. The other one is that a holy person is one who exercises self-control; that holiness makes it possible, and the other one is that a holy person will be self-controlled. Both of these are true implications. I do not know which is which, which I should choose because they are both true.

We could think of in terms of (remember what I have made the distinction in all these sermons where I have talked about the fruit of the Spirit), that there are human counterparts to these. There is human love, there is human joy, there is human faith, there is human kindness, there is human meekness, there is human self-control.

But the virtues, or the fruits, as inspired and produced by the Holy Spirit are different. They are a cut above, and that is what holy means. So when we are talking about the self-control that is a fruit of the Spirit. this is a kind of self-control that can only come from a holy people because they are the ones that are set apart by the Holy Spirit. That is easy to look at it from the first point of view, that only holiness makes this kind of self-control possible.

It is not until God gives us the Holy Spirit that we can even *think* about this kind of self-control. We could be all kinds of willpower, you know, and be able to do all these things humanly. But once we have the Holy Spirit that adds a next level to it, that is far beyond what any human person could do.

Or, you can think of it in terms of yourself—you are able to avoid eating chocolate ice cream by your own willpower. And maybe you thought this was a great accomplishment. and maybe it was. Maybe if you had given into those urges, you would be 600 lbs. All that could be true.

But when God gave you the Holy Spirit, he enabled you to do far more than resist a bowl of ice cream. He made it possible for you not to eat shellfish, pork; to keep the holy days and the Sabbath. He made it possible for you to see things from His point of view so that you would know that doing certain

things was not right, that it was wrong and that you should therefore conduct your life according to those things, according to a standard that you had never known before.

And this gave you a level of self-control, or at least it should have given you a level of self-control that you would be able to see things from a whole new point of view. And because God said that this is right and this is wrong, you control yourself to follow those things. Only a holy people, who have been given the Holy Spirit, can actually practice the self-control that Paul is thinking about—*enkrateia*.

The second one that I talked about, that only a holy person or that a holy person is one who exercises self-control is also true, because only a person who is holy can exercise this kind of self-control. They are both true.

Now you can see what Paul was talking about here, that an overseer—a bishop, an elder, a person who has been put over other people in the church—should be practicing this because he is been given this task, and he wants to please God, obviously.

Turn to I Corinthians 7. This one is in the marriage chapter, right at the end of the first paragraph that Paul gives on marriage. By the way, these are verb forms.

I Corinthians 7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; . . .

Meaning, he was single at this point. He had never married, or was no longer married. He was likely no longer married if he had been part of the Sanhedrin. He probably had a wife, which was a qualification. But, now he has one no longer.

I Corinthians 7:9 . . . but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

This one obviously has a sexual context: Controlling oneself to avoid committing fornication, and therefore breaking the 7th commandment. One must exercise self-control. *Enkrateia* (notice verse 9) is contrasted or

opposed to burning with passion. So, we can see here its opposite and it helps to explain what Paul is talking about.

Remember, I talked just a few minutes ago about the hot stimuli and the cold stimuli? Here clearly Paul is using an extreme image of burning with passion almost like there is flames coming out to illustrate the contrast to the cool self-control. So, you have the devil-on your-shoulder hot stimuli of burning with passion, and you have the cool self-control on the other hand. In fact, with this illustration of burning with passion, he is showing exercising self-control to be ice cold to sin.

So, we have these two extremes burning with passion—hot, hot hot! Too hot to touch! And then you have on this other side exercising self-control which is like ice to sin. Paul is saying that if one has not developed this control over his fleshly lusts, all these fleshly urges, one is single and needs control them, he had better find a godly way to contain them. He had better exercise self-control, get the little grey cells going, and think through how he can avoid the marshmallows. You understand what I mean? The hot stimuli. He has to figure out a way not to burn with passion.

What does he do? He has to contain these urges. And Paul says, “I’ve got a great container for those urges! Guys, get married! Marriage is the container for these urges.” That is pretty good advice, is it not? If you have a problem and you see you have a problem, you have got these urges, desires, whatever, a lust. Or it is just the carnal fleshly thing that is been made into you—God gave us sexual urges; they are not wrong. They are just wrong when they are used wrong—in the wrong place, or at the wrong time.

So, in a similar vein, He made us to drink, to eat, to speak; He made us to do all these things. And it is the misuse of those things that is bad. In the right place at the right time, eating, drinking, speaking, sexual things, are all fine. They are all good. They can all give us pleasure.

But if we are at the wrong time of our lives, are in the wrong place, or in the wrong situation, we have got to figure out a way to contain them, so that we do not break out into sin. We have to use this cooler thought process of self-control to find a container for those urges. So, Paul says the container for the sexual sins is marriage.

Now, what if it is something else? What if it is alcohol? Well, the container is not a jug of hooch. The container is total temperance—total abstinence from alcohol. If you know you have a problem, do not get near this stuff. Stay away from alcohol. Stay away from places that have alcohol. Stay away from the clubs, the dance halls, the bars, even restaurants if you have to—stay away! No clubs, no liquor stores, no bottle in the back of the cabinet, no flask in the glove box. No telling yourself, “it’ll be okay just this once.” You have to contain it, you have got to be ice cold on the other side. Because this is hot, hot, hot temptation, you have to go to the very opposite extreme, or else you are not going to tackle it, if the lust is that bad.

What if it is food? What if every time there is a stressful situation, you eat five dozen doughnuts? What do you do? Well, it is enforced moderation. Like I said, you have got to eat, but you have got to make sure that you only eat so much, and of the right things; and you have got to be in control. This has got to be a deep mental exercise.

Solomon, in Proverbs 23:2 tells us, “Put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.” Do you see the extreme cold measure he tells us to do? If it is a problem, go in the total other direction! Slit your throat (so to speak).

It becomes a matter of strict adherence to appropriate portion sizes and no binging at all. All of these things becomes a psychological investigation to find out why we eat what we do, when we do, how much we do, and to figure out why where all this started and to try to work your mind around going the right way or around to going the right way.

What about this? What if it is money? What if you have a problem with spending, spending, spending your money as soon as it comes in? It never touches your pocket. It just goes out. What do you do then? It is a strict budget. It is cutting up the credit cards. It is stopping those trips to the mall, on the computer to amazon.com. It is quit making spontaneous purchases. Only carry so much cash with you so you do not spend it. Quit going out to eat all the time. Quit going to Starbucks.

I saw this the other day. I mentioned it to my family that the average 18- to 24-year-old in the United States spends \$25 a week at Starbucks, or some

other of those various types of coffee shops. That is about one nice coffee a day, because they are expensive. Just get the tall. If you spend any more for some of the bigger ones, you might just as well hand over your check.

If you have a money problem and you do not have control over that, you have got to do something, and it has got to be extreme. It has got to be ice cold to counter the hot stimuli. So, start saving, even if it is just a little bit of money. Put it away. Like I said, get under a strict budget. Do not allow yourself to spend; also figure out why you spend.

We have to learn to change our minds about material things and turn it to something better; to spiritual things; to giving.

What if it is a problem with speech, and this could be any kind of bad speech—profanity, gossip, offending others, whatever it is. We have to do the total cold stimuli treatment on this, bite your tongue. Maybe you should enforce silence on yourself, wrap the duct tape around your head so your jaw will not open. However you have to do it. Stop saying those things!

James says you have to put a bridle in your mouth. You have to be in control so that it says the right things. So, you have to do things like every time you think of a mean thing to say to somebody, and you would normally blurt it out, say something kind instead. Or of course, bite your tongue, if you cannot go that far. Remember the old Ugly Duckling song, “If you can't say something nice, sshhh, say nothing.” (I heard that all the time because it was my youngest sister Sharon's record, and she would play it and play it and play it. Anyway, it is permanently on the brain now. That goes way back.)

But James 3 says that this is an area in which we all stumble. If you can master your tongue, you can master your whole body. Most of us sin with our lips all the time and so, this is something we need to apply the ice-cold stimuli response to. We have got to do something to keep from doing that bad thing, using that bad speech, saying that wrong thing by going to the other extreme and doing something nice, saying something nice—changing the mind that comes up with those bad words.

These are just some examples. But until the inner controls are built up and strong enough to resist these temptations to do these bad, hot button things,

we have to lean on our ice-cold behaviors to avoid the sin. If that is what it takes, do it.

What did Jesus say? “If your hand offends you, cut it off! If your eye offends you, pluck it out!” If your tongue offends. . . . Well, He did not say this, but you get the point. He is of the same mind as Solomon. Do something extreme, an opposite and good to counter that bad thing and learn self-control.

Turn back to I Corinthians 9. This is probably the best-known use of *enkrateia* in the whole New Testament.

I Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [*enkrateia*] in all things. Now they [athletes] do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air [he does not want to shadowbox]. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

We have another verb form, temperate, as it is used here, but it is the same word, *enkrateia*.

Paul tells us that for the sake of the goal toward which he strives; for the sake of the commission that he has been given by God as an apostle, and as a preacher of righteousness; for the sake of the task that he must fulfill in that position, he refrains himself from doing anything that might hamper his performance or the outcome of those things.

He has to master himself. He has to control himself, like an Olympian trying to win the gold medal. He has to do whatever it takes, go through whatever exercises, he has to control what goes in his body in form of food and drink. He has to get the right sleep. He has to put himself on a schedule. He has to do all those things, all the time, mastering his urges to do otherwise, so that the right product will be brought about in the end.

He says, if people out there in the world can do this for a wreath of leaves (which is what they ran for then), or maybe to get their name inscribed on a wall, if they could do that and all they are getting is a laurel leaf wreath, cannot we do it for the Kingdom of God and eternal life?

There is no comparison! They are doing it for a perishable crown. How long do leaves last? We just talked about leaves in the sermonette. They are alive only for one season usually, and then they are gone, and they fall on the ground, and he picks them up and use them as mulch. That is how imperishable the crown was. But they were willing to put forth all that effort to do it. And ours is such a more glorious goal and purpose! Why cannot we buckle down and control ourselves?

There is one thing that is really different about this kind of self-control, and it comes out right here, and it also came out in Titus 1, and that is that he practiced self-control (I am talking about Paul) for the benefit of the brethren. See? That is one of the huge differences between the Greek idea of *enkrateia* and the Christian idea of *enkrateia*—*we practice self-control for others*. We do it for ourselves as well because we are trying to get this crown, but we have got a job to do. We are supposed to be serving others, and ultimately, we are supposed to be pleasing God. And so our self-control begins with our self, but ultimately, it is thrown outward. It is an outward thing, a loving thing.

Did not I say the fruit of the Spirit starts the list, because all the other ones after it are just parts of love? Self-control is too. You practice self-control for others, others in the church, in your family, in the world, and ultimately for the Great Other—God—because we are trying to please Him.

So self-control is practiced not just for our own betterment, but to help others; to serve others; and of course, to be worthy of, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This is a major difference between human self-control, and self-control as a fruit of God's Spirit. I do not know if you noticed it, but in most of the passages where we read about *enkrateia*, it is shown to be a response. We

looked at it specifically in one instance, but most of them they were also responses to a prior gift from God. Remember God gave righteousness, and self-control was the response.

So, in Galatians 5:23, it is a product of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Very clear there. In Acts 24 where Paul was talking to Felix, we saw that God gives righteousness, our response is self-control. In I Peter 1:3-5 (this may be a little harder to see because we did not read the verses), Peter said that God's divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and that we are part takers of the divine nature. And then he says we are to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, etcetera.

And here, in I Corinthians 9, Paul was given a commission, and the power to perform it, and his response was to exercise self-control. So, I think we are beginning to see here how important self-control is and how it is an outward type of thing.

I have one more point to bring out back in Genesis 39. We can see a lot of things in an example. This is the example of Joseph in Egypt.

Genesis 39:1-12 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The LORD WAS with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD WAS with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD WAS on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife,

"Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

Here is the example, great example of Joseph fleeing fornication. Now, if we had just seen only from about verse 10 on that Joseph had merely run from Potiphar's wife, we could not say that his self-control was all that strong, but Moses went to great lengths to tell us that he controlled himself day by day. How long was he in his master's house, and this was happening, that Joseph had controlled himself day by day? That means, for an extended period of time, he had been exercising self-control over this lady's come-ons! He was not going to give in to her temptation there.

We find that his flight, in verse 12, was not part of his self-control mechanism. He did not need it, because he had shown day by day by day by day, over and over and over and over that he was not going to give in to her. He said, "Why would I do this monstrous thing? I would be sinning against God!"

What he did in fleeing was not necessarily his self-control mechanism. It was that he wanted to avoid the appearance of evil! He did not want to be seen as even thinking about giving in to the woman.

Now it was a good thing to do that he fled. But his self-control is seen in that he did it day by day by day. He never gave into her at all. It was all inside. He never once thought about that, because God had given him commandments, and he knew that it would be a sin against God.

His self-control was strong and internal. And it is repeated a few times in this that he did it because of the fact that the Lord was with him and that he had blessed him.

Now we do not know when Joseph was converted, but he clearly was converted by this point because of what is said there. Now this begins to get back to the point I brought up as I ended my introduction that self-control happens when we begin and continue to change our minds; that when we begin to repent and continue repenting, we are practicing self-control. But we know here that the Lord was with Joseph and the master saw that the Lord was with Joseph. So he was obviously displaying the fruits of God's Spirit.

We see his self-control. He knew it was wrong to lie with his master's wife, so he controlled his young man's urges. And he became a remarkable example of self-control.

Now let us look at one more. It is in Luke 4:1-13. I do not have time to read it, but you all know it—the temptation of Christ by Satan the Devil.

Interestingly, *enkrateia* is not used in the gospels. Why use the word when you have the perfect example, displaying it in four books? Here Jesus shows incredible self-control; it was 40 days and nights with no food or water. He was famished.

And Satan says, “How about making these stones into bread?” Jesus says, “No. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word out of the mouth of God.”

Then he says, “Okay Jesus, let us go here. I am going to show you all the kingdoms of the earth. You can have them; I can give them to you; they are mine.” Jesus says, “No thanks.” He says, “You shall worship the Lord Your God, and Him only shall you serve,” because by taking the kingdoms of the earth, he would have been worshipping Satan.

And Satan says, “Okay, Jesus, let us go to the pinnacle of the Temple; look at the crowds out there! You're weak. Nobody knows you. Your ministry hasn't started. Let us get it started with a bang! I will throw you we off the pinnacle of the Temple, and God's going to send His angels so you will not splat there on the pavement. Great miracle! The angels will drop you gently down to the earth. Thousands of Jews will say, ‘Here is our Messiah. He's

come down from heaven. The angels brought Him.” (That is essentially what he was telling him here.) “We’ll do all your work for you right here.” And Jesus says, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”

Notice how he maintained His self-control. Not only did He fast, which gave Him the inner strength, but he refuted each one of the devil's temptations with Scripture. What does this say? Scripture is a reflection of the mind of God, and by quoting a scripture to Satan, He was saying, “This is how God reacts to temptation. This is the mind of God on this issue.”

His mind, we see, is in perfect harmony with God's will for Him.

See? We do not have that. Jesus had the mind of God. We have this gutter mind that we have learned from birth, and we have got to put the mind of God in. God helps us. He gives us His Word, He gives us His Holy Spirit. He says, go out there and learn to have My thoughts.

And you do this with the experiences you go through day by day. The temptations you face day by day. Start quoting Scripture! Start having it in your brain/mind so that when the situations come that tempt us those hot situations, we can come across with the cold Word of God, and say, “No, this is not God's will. I will do God's will, which is what is shown in His Word, which is a reflection of His mind, and I will please Him.”

So, self-control is putting on the mind of God, and living it out day by day.