

## The Essence Of Self-Control

**Purity of the Body and Holiness of the Heart**

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We live in a nation that is out of control. Individual responsibility is dead and self-control is a foreign term even to those in the justice system of the United States, as we have seen this week with the national legalization of sodomy. This opens the door to pedophilia, incest, and polygamy. They have cast off all restraint! Any thing can now be done privately, and soon, anything will be done publicly.

We know that this nation is not really out of control in the sense that it is unrestrained, because God is still on His throne and has to allow it in order for anything to happen. It is out of control in the sense of its own behavior because most people refuse to have self-control, they refuse to govern themselves.

**Isaiah 59:1-4** Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities [or lack of self-control] have separated you from your God; and your sins [your out-of-control behavior] have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.

If that does not describe the nation at this point, there is very little that will. So really, sin is basically out of control behavior. Anytime we give in to our raw lusts and desires, we have lost control of proper behavior, right thought and action, and have cast off all restraint.

Men have debated the structure of government for millennia, but most have been unwilling to recognize that even a seemingly perfect structure cannot provide justice and peace without self-government. The issue in this nation is

that people refuse to take responsibility in self-governing themselves and so they push to do whatever they want.

No government can be good for its people, if its people refuse to take responsibility for their own actions and control their desires to do what is right in their own eyes. Taking responsibility for one's own thoughts and actions and having self-control are synonymous.

But we live in a society that tries to justify behavior problems. George F. Will, an ABC News commentator and author, stated in his article titled "Electronic Morphine," in the November 25, 2002 issue of *Newsweek*:

It is worrisome that society is medicalizing more and more behavioral problems, often defining as addictions what earlier, sterner generations explained as weaknesses of will. Prodded by science, or what purports to be science, society is reclassifying what once were considered character flaws or moral failings as personality disorders akin to physical disabilities.

I think this is an excellent summary of the movement that homosexuals are using to force it upon this nation, and that the people of this nation have willingly accepted.

A leader, especially, must govern himself. If a person undertakes to lead a nation, what value is he to the people or to the government if he cannot control his own appetites, passions, and desires? People are like sheep. They will follow the leader's example, even if it leads them to harm. They follow the example of their leaders for better or for worse. Former president Bill Clinton is a prime example of a leader who cannot control his own appetites, passions, and desires. By his reasoning and actions, he made great perversions openly acceptable among both children and adults in the United States.

Although we may be influenced by a leader's lack of responsibility, God holds us individually responsible for our own actions. It is foundationally important and an integral part of Christianity that an individual who is

entrusted with the care of others be able to properly govern himself. Self-control is the virtue that makes a person so master of himself that he is fit to be servant of others.

When God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, they "passed through the sea, [and] all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (I Corinthians 10:1-2). By all outward appearances, it seemed they would enjoy the privileges of being God's people.

Tragedy soon trampled their hope because fleshly excesses trampled the law and love of God. Self-interest overran concern for others. Their miraculous deliverance from Egypt was forgotten, and all the Israelites above 20 years of age, with few exceptions, were brought down in the wilderness because of this lack of self-control!

So Paul warns,

**I Corinthians 10:12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

The development of self-control was essential for the Israelites who assumed they were special (and they were), but they did not make an effort to control themselves right from the start—beginning with the events surrounding the manufacture and worship of the golden calf. Their assumption led to neglect and that led them to becoming out of control mentally and physically. God had warned them that curses would be the result of not controlling themselves. They even forgot this statement from God.

Deuteronomy 28:15-68; Leviticus 26:14-46 spell out with vivid clarity what would happen to Israel and her descendants if she did not control herself. He has designed curses to be the inherent result of being self-indulgent.

**Deuteronomy 28:19-20** "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me.

That is exactly where this nation stands today. It is receiving the cursing, the confusion, and the rebuke that God promised that Israel would receive if they did not develop self-control and obedience to His commandments. If you read to the end of the chapter, you will find an accurate description of this nation's self-indulgent nature, and the future it has in store.

A lack of self-control is the natural tendency for human beings, as we see in the example of the newly-liberated nation of Israel. When left to herself, while Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, she quickly turned to idol worship and wild behavior. Exodus 32:25 indicates that Israel made herself a laughingstock to her enemies.

Because of this tendency, we are warned against losing self-control and are called to practice self-discipline. Paul states that lack of self-control will be common in the last days.

**II Timothy 3:1-5** But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

We receive that message very strongly, from Jesus Christ through the apostle Paul, that we are to avoid such people. I find it interesting that Paul links that there "having a form of godliness but denying its power." That is exactly what we see in the churches of this nation. We see the real foundation from which their belief comes in that one church group after another in mainstream Christianity seems to be rolling over to accepting homosexuals not only as members but even putting them in places of leadership as there pastors and preachers. Where will that lead? That will lead those churches the same direction as this whole nation.

This type of person is seen more often than not on television shows and in the movie theaters. The more out of control an actor or performer is, the more he is promoted to attract audiences. The hero is glorified for his self-indulgence and disregard for the law. In today's society, the out of control

performers are huge money-makers because sin is enticing and it pays extremely well, but it only pays short term rewards that have severe side effects. God calls these side effects *curses*! And because these actors and actresses live the same way in their real lives as they portray in movies, we see the cesspool of Hollywood and the very dregs of society morally.

When the defense mechanism of self-control is missing or neglected, people stumble into foolishness and disgrace. So this country too is stumbling into disgrace. We are the laughingstock of other countries and other peoples. Alcoholism and gluttony both lead to such stumbling and in no way amplify love. One magazine reported:

At one-third of the colleges surveyed, more than half of the student body were binge drinkers [drinking themselves into unconsciousness]—binge drinking was most prevalent (at 81.1%) among students in fraternities and sororities," and, "approximately two of five (or 42.7%) American college students can be termed binge drinkers."

These sobering statistics are only part of the findings that Stephen G. Tibbets and Joshua N. Whittimore describe in a Psychological Reports study on college students' self-control, substance abuse and commitment to school was the focus of this study.

As might be expected, consumption of large amounts of alcohol and using illicit drugs are correlated with lower commitment to school; as academic performance drops, so with it, education as a priority drops. Being a male student was further associated with substance abuse, as was receiving external funding and being a fraternity brother. [This means the student was either a free-loader, his parents were paying his way, or he had a scholarship, and/or he was in a fraternity he had more of a likelihood of being a binge drinker.]

"On the other hand," researchers write, "GPA, age, having an older brother, being employed 30 or more hours, and being religious were associated with lower substance abuse." Similarly, one might expect that lack of self-control would contribute to substance

abuse, and even that commitment to school would have an "inhibiting effect" on substance abuse. [Or you might say "self-control." People with self-control were associated with less substance abuse. Even that commitment to school would have an inhibiting effect on substance abuse.]

However, it is the confluence of all of these factors that is the most surprising—not for the result, but the scale of the effect: "the interaction between low self-control and commitment to school had the largest effect upon substance abuse of all the component variables in the estimated model. Thus, the combined influence, i. e., interaction of the two primary variables had a greater combined effect than that observed for the independent effects of either of the separate influences of low self-control and commitment to school."

In the end, students exhibiting low self-control as well as low commitment to school were the most prone to be substance abusers. Not only are low self-control and lack of commitment to school predictive of substance abuse by themselves, but together, they produce a potential hangover of immense proportions. [That is, throughout the rest of a person's life. That is the effect. That is why this is of immense proportions. They set the stage for the rest of their lives.]

Three forms of evil that destroy a person's reputation and lead him to a wasted life are brought together in Proverbs 23: drunkenness, gluttony, and laziness—all are major manifestations of a lack of self-control.

**Proverbs 23:19-21** Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.

**Proverbs 23:29-30** Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine.

"Mixed wine" refers to wine flavored with aromatic spices. These spices were chosen to increase the stimulating properties of the alcohol. There is a touch of sarcasm in the term "go in search of." It is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to diligently searching for knowledge. The question is "What knowledge are these drunkards searching for?"

The indication here is regarding the absurdity and folly of diligently searching for knowledge about anything while being in a drunken stupor and drowsy. Later, when sober, it would be near impossible to remember with any clarity anything of any value learned while under the influence. Many television shows have portrayed this type of person—a person so drunk that they do not know what they are saying. It is very sad.

In verse 30, the term "go in search of" is used to refer to the investigations of connoisseurs in wine, meeting to test its qualities while intoxicated. You can see the picture of them sitting around, barely able to sit up, slurring their words, giving their opinion on which wine is better. Because of their lack of self-control, they are foolish experts professing to be wise while intoxicated. The picture it paints is laughable.

While they lie around slurring their words in dissipation, acting as if they have great knowledge while wasting their money and their lives away, others around the world are in need of the basic necessities of life and many are starving. How does this show love for others? This sounds like a description of the politicians of the world as they attend public parties and entertain at home, while at the same time proclaiming their humanitarian efforts in order to get re-elected.

**Proverbs 23:31** Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

There we see the priority in their life. It is to go for another thrill and not have one iota of self-control.

There are many other ways people stumble: lust, greed, drowsiness, conceit, sexual sins, gossiping, violent quarreling, and false and careless speech—to name a few. There are uncountable things a person may revel in as he lacks the character to self-govern himself.

In the New Testament the most common Greek word for self-control is *egkrateia*. Its root meaning is "power over oneself" or "self-mastery." Self-control, in its widest sense, is mastery over our passions. It is the spirit that has mastered its desires and its love of pleasure. Paul uses this same Greek word translated "temperate" in I Corinthians 9:25 to refer to striving for a crown in the same way an athlete disciplines his body.

**I Corinthians 9:24-27** Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 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 in all things. Now they 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. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Self-control is the virtue that holds our appetites in check, controlling our rational will or regulating our conduct without being duly swayed by sensuous desires. Moderation is a key element in self-control. Paul said he had moderation in being able to discipline his body—but not totally because any time we are even partly human in nature, we are going to have a struggle to have self-control.

Turn with me to Galatians 5. This is one of the very first verses my father made me memorize. In verse 23, self-control closes the list of the fruit of the Spirit, just as revelries closes the list of the works of the flesh in verse 21.



**Galatians 5:16-21** I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

"Revelries" is translated from the Greek word "komos." A *komos* was a band of friends who accompanied the victor of the games after his victory. Much like the "groupies" today follow the rock stars. They danced and laughed and sang his praises. It also described the bands of the devotees of Bacchus, god of wine. It means unrestrained revelry, enjoyment that has degenerated into licentiousness—wastefulness, recklessness, and decadence. It is easy to see the contrast between revelries and self-control. They are direct opposites.

**Galatians 5:22-25** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

The flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another (verse 17). Self-control is not gained by just suppressing passions and desires, but by controlling the lusts of the flesh. Those who are "led by the Spirit" (verse 18), who "live in the Spirit," and "also walk in the Spirit" (verse 25) attain self-control and are on their way to fruitful growth in God's loving character.

All the traits in the list of the fruits of God's Spirit amplify "love." I John 4:8 says love is what God is. The final trait, self-control, is an essential element in the fulfillment of God's love. Just because it is listed last does not mean

self-control is the least important fruit of the Spirit. None of the fruit is "least." Each is essential to having a godly character, and one builds upon another. The fruit of the Spirit are sown in peace. But to have peace there must be controlled action. There must be self-control or you cannot have peace.

In Romans 12 and 13 Paul explains the essence of having self-control in three important ways:

1. Overcome evil with good.
2. Love one another.
3. Put on Christ.

Let us look at these three ways to develop self-control:

1. *Overcome evil with good*

In Romans 12:17-21 Paul takes his stand alongside us by giving us explicit counsel about how to face the hostile world, while developing self-mastery.

**Romans 12:17** Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

To repay "evil for evil" would be to follow the inclination of the flesh. We are constantly under scrutiny of others, both converted and unconverted people. Therefore we must be careful that our conduct does not betray the high standards of righteousness God has endeared to us.

The verb "have regard for" is literally "think of beforehand." This suggests that our conduct should not be regulated by habit only, but rather that each situation that holds a possibility for us to be a witness to the world be considered so that the action we take will not put a negative light on God's way of life. We do not want to go through life doing things automatically, without thinking, lest we cause God's way of life to be frowned upon or laughed at. This is not to say we should not develop good Christian habits, but that we should always exhibit contemplated self-control in what ever we do. We should develop good Christian habits. We should think about our actions as we do them.

**Romans 12:18-21** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The world's philosophy leads people to expect retaliation when they have wronged another. To receive kindness, to see love when it seems uncalled for, can melt the hardest heart. But, this type of response in the face of injury requires a substantial amount of self-control. It requires the development of love.

That brings us to the second way we develop self-control. That is:

## *2. Love one another*

Paul taught the church in Rome that in order to have love for others they must be conscious of how their actions affect others, whether positively or negatively.

**Romans 14:21** It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do **anything** by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Paul is describing self-restraint. He knew that self-control is not for the self only, but for others as well. We owe submission and honor to the civil authorities, but we owe all human beings much more.

**Romans 13:8** Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

In saying that the one who loves has fulfilled the law, Paul presents a truth that parallels his statement in Romans 8:4 where he says, "that the righteous

requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The connecting link between these two passages is provided by Galatians 5: 22-23. First place in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit is given to love, and the list is followed by the observation that against such fruit there is no law. So the Spirit produces in us a love to which the law cannot object, since love fulfills what the law requires, something the law itself cannot do.

**Romans 13:9-10** For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

There cannot be true self-control without love.

By concluding with the observation that love is the fulfillment of the law, Paul returns to the same thought he began with verse 8. In Christ the two concepts of love and law come together. To love others with the love that Christ exhibited *is* His new commandment. And if this love is present, it will make possible the keeping of all His other commandments—makes it possible for us to have self-control.

Love promotes obedience and self-control, and the two together constitute the law of Christ, love being the fulfillment of the law. Self-restraint and obedience to God's law is realized in outgoing concern for others that exceeds and rules over our own self-interest. It is impossible to be self-indulgent and keep God's law.

### *3. Put on Christ*

**Romans 13:11-13** And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in

revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

We are to live as though that final day has actually arrived, bringing with it the personal presence of Christ. There should be no room in our lives, then, for the conduct that characterizes worldly people.

In verse 13, Paul describes this decadent manner of life with three classes of sins: the first emphasizing overindulgence (which sets the stage for the other two), then sexual misconduct, followed by contention and quarreling. All three show that walking improperly results from a lack of self-control.

The first class of sins includes "revelry and drunkenness" indicating the immoral conduct, the noisy and aggressive laughter, and the scenes of disorder and sensuality, which accompany luxurious living. These were common behaviors among the pagan Gentiles. And with our country being a country of affluence, we are all the quicker to absorb these common behaviors of the pagan Gentiles—to the point that now this country has "out-paganed" the pagans.

The second class of sins includes "lewdness and lust" signifying immodest behavior. The Greek word includes illicit indulgences of all kinds. For example: fornication, adultery, and homosexuality. These were also common behaviors among the pagan Gentiles. Since Christians are a special people, Paul charges us to be pure and holy, to even avoid people who are guilty of these things.

The third class of sins includes "strife and envy." The word "strife" means "contention, disputes, litigations." "Envy" in the Greek indicates any intense, vehement passion. It includes the sin of envy as a catalyst. You know that when someone begins to envy someone else the attitude begins to degrade, hatred begins to form. They begin to lose self-control.

These vices are connected and usually accompany each other. Quarrels and contentions come out of situations of drunkenness and self-indulgence. Paul's point is that God's people should live in peace, not in revelry.

**Romans 13:14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

He is commanding us there not to even give a hint of opening to these lusts or desires of the flesh. Here, Paul concludes that the putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ is the deliberate and conscious acceptance of the lordship of the Master—so that all is under His control—that includes all our motives, desires, and actions.

But if this putting on of Christ is done in an attitude of complacency or self-righteousness, as though a life of godliness and uprightness will automatically follow, we will be deeply disappointed in the results. We have to be incessantly cautious for fear that the lust of the flesh will flare up. This complacency or lukewarmness is the problem of the Laodiceans. We know that the Laodiceans are the most active group in God's church at the end-time.

Self-control is active self-mastery. Self-mastery provides the ability to resist what may cause pain to other human beings. As a consequence, we apply self-mastery for others, as well as for ourselves. By doing this, we also strengthen the second point: to "love one another."

By resisting doing harm to other people, love is made personal because it involves personal sacrifice. A truly converted Christian is not ready for God's Family until self-control is permanently internalized. That is, made part of our set character, and that requires giving up personal desires for the benefit of others. There are many things we would like to do, but if they are not going to be to the benefit of someone else, we should reconsider doing them.

Jesus Christ's mastery of self is the foremost example. We always turn to Him for the epitome of the right example. He suffered for us. He was reviled, yet He committed no sin. Peter describes the character of our Savior in I Peter 2:23, "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten." He just turned the other cheek in self-control.

Christ's self-mastery was extraordinary as He faced His excruciatingly painful death. Jesus could have called down great power from heaven, but He restrained Himself and exhibited outgoing concern for others instead of for Himself.

Early in His ministry, Christ revealed the basis of His self-mastery. Matthew 5:17 records His words, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." To amplify, to live God's law.

Christ knew these precious commands are eternally righteous standards. They are tried and true. So Christ amplified God's laws of love. He learned and walked by God's standard of righteousness. In I John 2:1, John calls Him, "Jesus Christ the righteous."

Since He never sinned, He did not need to be reshaped, but Christ did have to master the corruptible flesh He lived in. He had to resist temptation and submit to God's law. That mastery was not easy even for Him. Christ set an extraordinary example of self-mastery. He was the master of self-control. Even in this prophecy He is depicted as a man of self-control.

**Isaiah 53:7-9** He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Jesus lived a life of self-control, mastering potentially lustful and destructive thoughts and actions. Here in Isaiah 53 in just these three verses—three times—self-control of His mouth is emphasized. That He "kept His mouth shut" indicates that there is much more self-control needed in keeping our mouths shut than almost any other human tendency. He had to overcome human tendencies just as we do—resisting temptation and submitting to God's law. Here one of the emphases is that He opened not His mouth—He

held His tongue. Elsewhere it says that the man who can control his tongue is a perfect man. We know there are no perfect men, so we know that no one can completely control his tongue.

Jesus was tempted for forty days in the wilderness by Satan. Satan tempted Him in the area of physical need. Jesus refused to yield to him by saying: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Satan tempted Him with pride. Jesus refused to yield to him saying: "You shall not tempt the LORD your God" (Matthew 4:7). Satan tempted Him with worldly glory and riches. Jesus refused to yield to him saying: "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10).

Throughout Jesus' life on earth, Satan continued to tempt Him, but Jesus never lost His self-control. Neither did He yield to Satan's temptation. Jesus not only won the victory for Himself, but He also opened up the way for victory over sin and death for us. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus Christ,

**Philippians 2:8** being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

In verse 5 Paul admonishes,

**Philippians 2:5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

We see there that humility is a major characteristic of a person who has self-control—because many of the things that we want to do or say out of control, especially out of our mouths, is because we are not humble. We are all striving for that humility. We need to be reshaped because self-control does not come naturally. This reshaping requires having the mind of Christ.

**Ezekiel 11:19-20** "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh,



and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

It takes a new spirit, the Spirit of God, to be able to have that self-control that Jesus Christ exhibited.

Jesus fought and struggled against the natural, corruptible desires of the human mind. In this He set the example. He set an example by keeping the commandments of God, not doing away with them. In this we should walk also. If we look at mainstream Christianity, they do away with one commandment after another very rapidly. Now that they are accepting of homosexual behavior within the "Christian" churches, we can see that there is no reason to keep any of the other commandments because they are doing away with all of them as it is by their actions, by their teachings. They are causing the Bible to have no credibility in their areas of religion.

**I John 2:3-6** Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

We see that Jesus Christ had self-control. That is part of our walk as well. We *must* have self-control. Walking as Christ walked means to carefully consider our thoughts and actions in every situation.

The contrast between lack of control and self-control is dramatic. A lack of control is spiritually unclean and self-indulgent. Self-control is holy and pleasing to God. A holy life demonstrates God's supernatural power at work overcoming what is natural behavior for human beings. A holy walk glorifies God.

Paul also worked hard on self-discipline. As a minister he had to discipline his body and bring it into subjection, or his credibility and effectiveness would have been severely affected. Paul's understanding of the essential need for self-control and his concern for the brethren drove him to warn and

caution the brethren that a lack of self-control shows short-sightedness because its damage is long-lasting—affecting our future both physically and spiritually.

Take for example sexual immorality. Paul calls it unclean, to say the least. Verses 1-8 of I Thessalonians 4 are an exhortation to flourish in holiness, to thrive more and more in that which is good.

**I Thessalonians 4:1-2** Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

In verses 1 and 2, Paul hoped that by his exhortation the Thessalonians would abound more and more in holy walking, that is that they would excel in those things that are good—in good works. They were well known for their faith throughout the churches of God, but Paul was admonishing them to make more progress in holiness. Paul knew that with the help of the Holy Spirit they could reach their true potential in holiness. But as yet they had not reached it.

It is not enough for us to just represent the faith of God, but we have to flourish in the work of faith. We have to not just persevere to the end, but we have to grow in grace and knowledge, and walk more closely with God. We do that with prayer, fasting, and Bible study.

Paul informed the Thessalonian church of their duty. They knew their Master's will, and could not plead ignorance as an excuse. Now just as faith is dead without practice, so also knowledge is dead without practice. They had received of, and been taught by, those who had been instruments in converting them to Christianity, how they ought to walk. They were not ignorant of how to walk or of what their job was—to walk as Christ walked. Self-control takes an immense amount of effort and consciousness.

**I Thessalonians 4:3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.

Paul cautions the Thessalonians against uncleanness, because it is a sin directly contrary to sanctification. It is a sin against the holy walking in which he so earnestly exhorts them to be diligent.

This caution is expressed as abstinence from sexual immorality in verse 3. By this we are to understand all uncleanness, either in a married or unmarried state. Adultery is of course included. Other sorts of uncleanness are also forbidden, of which it is a shame even to speak, even though they are done by many in secret. All that is contrary to purity in heart, speech, and behavior, is contrary to God's command, and contrary to the holiness that the God requires.

This not only includes sexual immorality on a physical level, but spiritual immorality—spiritual adultery—as well. That is, going after other gods, accepting doctrines contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. A member of God's church may commit spiritual adultery if he allows himself to be enticed by the teachings of other religions. For example, to allow oneself to be fascinated by Far Eastern and Native American religions as we see promoted in many movies today is spiritual adultery for those in God's church.

We especially see these pagan religious teachings promoted in children's movies and cartoons by Disney. The circle of life, the yin yang, and reincarnation are major themes. We also see these pagan teachings manifested in the form of spirit guides and dream catchers of the Native American religions. The dream catchers are those circles dressed in feathers that we see dangling from so many people's mirrors as you drive down the road.

Witchcraft is one the fastest growing religions among girls and young woman, especially in the high schools and colleges. We should be guarding our children from unknowingly committing such spiritual immorality.

In verse 3, Paul said this sanctification that deals with purity of body and holiness of heart is the will of God. It is the will of God in general that we should be holy, because He who called us is holy, and because we are chosen to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit. Not only does God

require purity in our bodies, but also holiness in our hearts, and that we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and Spirit.

**II Corinthians 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness [or, uncleanness] of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

When the body is devoted to God, and dedicated and set apart for Him, it should be kept clean and pure for His service. Sexual morality and spiritual faithfulness are required for our sanctification. Even physical personal hygiene fits into this requirement. We see this type in the priestly requirements of washing before performing duties in the temple of God.

**I Thessalonians 4:4** that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.

In verse 4, Paul implies that sanctification is greatly for our honor, whereas uncleanness is a great dishonor. The body is called the vessel of the mind, and it must be kept pure from defiling lusts. Everyone should be careful to value his own honor and not allow fleshly desires to make him shameful. Our uncontrolled appetites and passions should not be allowed to gain the upper hand, domineering our reason and conscience. For a rational mind to be enslaved by bodily desires and base appetites is dishonorable for a child of God.

**I Thessalonians 4:5** not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

In verse 5, Paul admonished the Thessalonians not to indulge in strong or abnormal desire or appetite like the Gentiles who do not know God. The Gentiles, and especially the Grecians, were commonly guilty of some sins of uncleanness that were not so obviously forbidden in the natural scheme of things. But they did not know God, nor His mind and will, as well as we know God's will, specifically here in verse 5 our sanctification. It is not surprising, then, that the Gentiles indulge their fleshly appetites and lusts; but we should not walk as unconverted Gentiles in lasciviousness, lusts, drunkenness, gluttony, and carousing.

**I Peter 4:1-5** Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

**I Thessalonians 4:6** that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

In verse 6, Paul warns that the sin of uncleanness, especially adultery, does great injustice to others and God will be the avenger for those who are hurt by such sin. Paul warns that no one should defraud his brother in any matter, especially in the sin of uncleanness.

Paul's warning and caution is against all injustice and oppression, all fraud and deceit in our dealings with others. We should not take advantage of those who are ignorant of the facts, or who out of necessity must accept a detrimental agreement. Nor should we defraud anyone. And even though this may go unnoticed, we can be sure that the righteous God will give the frauds what they deserve.

Paul's warning here is, more specifically, to show the injustice that, in many cases, is done by the sin of uncleanness. Not only are sexual immorality and other acts of uncleanness sins against the person's body who commits them, ruinous to the sinner himself both in mind and body, but they are also very injurious, and no less than defrauding, acts of injustice to others. They are especially injurious to those who are joined together in the marriage covenant and to their children who also suffer. And, since this sin is of such an appalling nature, so it follows that God will be the avenger of it.

**Hebrews 13:4** Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

In Romans 1:18, Paul warned and cautioned that the wrath of God will be sent against all ungodliness and unrighteousness among humanity because they know better than to reject Him.

**I Thessalonians 4:7** For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

Verse 7 puts the emphasis on the called. "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness." When God called us to be His followers, we were not called to lead lives of impurity, but of holiness. We have a responsibility to fulfill the purposes for which we were called.

The word "uncleanness," *akatharsia*, generally means impurity or filth. In a moral sense it suggests pollution or lewdness, as opposed to spiritual faithfulness. It is spiritual unfaithfulness in a very filthy way.

Salvation has a purpose, and uncleanness, or moral pollution, is not its purpose. Paul is reiterating the thought of verse 3. The will of God designs that a called person should live in sanctification. This is a process rather than the state of being sanctified. Paul warns that the sin of uncleanness is contrary to the nature and design of our Christian calling. The law of God forbids all impurity, and the gospel requires the greatest purity. It calls us from uncleanness to holiness.

Since self-control leads to holiness it is crucial for Christ's followers that self-discipline be a governing quality for every member of God's church. Paul explained to Titus that self-control is one of the important qualities required for a sound church.

**Titus 2:1-3** But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that

they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.

**Titus 2:6-10** Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Continuing in I Thessalonians 4.

**I Thessalonians 4:8** Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

In verse 8, the word "reject" indicates the treating of this sanctification as worthless, breaks God's law. God has placed the Holy Spirit within us to make us holy. The emphasis is on holy. Those whom it indwells are called to reflect His holiness.

Contempt therefore of God's law is contempt of God Himself: He that rejects that a true Christian must be sanctified, pure, and holy spiritually, rejects and despises God. False Christians may make light of the principle of purity and holiness, but the apostle Paul makes it clear that these are God's commands, and to violate them was no less than to reject and despise God.

Paul adds to the end of this principle—God has given us His Spirit—suggesting that all kinds of uncleanness grieves the Holy Spirit, and will cause it to dissipate from us. Also the Holy Spirit is given to us to arm us against these sins of uncleanness and to help us to crush these deeds of the body, so we may live eternally.

**Romans 8:12-14** Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the

flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Self-control is the manifestation of God's work in man through the Holy Spirit. Paul elaborated in His teaching on self-control that Christian self-mastery results from using the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit-controlled mind that is strengthened with power to control rebellious desires and to resist the appeal of tempting pleasures.

**Ephesians 5:17-18** Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.

The person who is unwise is guilty of stupid gullibility or senseless folly in action. In contrast, to understand is to focus the mind on something so that you can get hold of it. It implies that an effort has to be made. It has the sense of trying to grasp it. The purpose of this determined attempt to capture understanding is to comprehend the Lord's will. God's will is the regulative principle of a Christian's life. It is something we must learn and understand.

Self-control is required for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Having knowledge of God without the practical experience of self-responsibility is not enough for entrance into the Kingdom. But with the help of God's divine power of self-control—that is, self-mastery, self-discipline, willpower, restraint, and strength of mind—is produced.

**Romans 2:6-10** who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Attaining self-mastery requires daily dedication to walking in God's law. Paul refers to this as patient continuance. Christ walked this way to establish



mastery and control over potentially lustful and destructive thoughts and actions.

In II Corinthians 10:5 Paul tells us that we must, in the same way, be "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." We have to learn to resist even things that, though they may be lawful—though technically by the letter of the law may be legal—might cause offense or harm to a fellow human being.

Self-mastery fastens harmony between God's law and human actions. The fruit of God's Spirit, including self-control, unifies us to God in great harmony. The unifying fruit of God's Spirit reshapes us. Each fruit contributes to the whole process of salvation. Each fruit contributes to the development of God's own holy, righteous character.

The process of salvation must issue in a life of holiness, reverence, and love. We have to prepare our minds for action with careful attention to the results. This requires sound judgment in all areas of life. God is described as holy. Holiness includes purity and moral integrity. Those called to be God's children are to be like Him. The basic idea of holiness in the Bible is that of separation from all that is spiritually unclean. The simplest understanding of holiness is that of loving conformity to God's commands and to His Son and fellow human beings.

**I Peter 1:13-16** Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."