

LESSON 7

*Self-Control**“[add] to knowledge self-control”*

THE MEANS BY WHICH KNOWLEDGE IS CARRIED FURTHER DOWN THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION IS SELF-CONTROL. KNOWLEDGE IS OF NO USE TO THE ONE WHO DOES NOT APPLY IT.

It is not difficult to understand the natural progression in Peter’s list thus far. Having been called “to his [Jesus’] own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3), the Christian is to add the goal of virtue to his faith. This requires an addition of knowledge for guidance in the aim of faith, participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) – the substance of virtue. However, as stated before, knowledge involves utility – it is meant to have an

effect on the knower. The means by which knowledge is carried further down the path of transformation is “*self-control*” (2 Peter 1:6). Knowledge is of no use to the one who does not apply it. Applying knowledge requires “*self-control*.”

SELF-CONTROL (EGKRATEIA) DEFINED

- self-control (especially continence): — temperance. (STRONG)
- restraint of one’s emotions, impulses, or desires, self-control (BDAG)
- self-control (the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites) (THAYER)
- from *kratos*, “strength,” occurs in Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:6 (twice), in all of which it is rendered “temperance”; the RV marg., “self-control” is the preferable rendering, as “temperance” is now limited to one form of self-control; the various powers bestowed by God upon man are capable of abuse; the right use demands the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God; in Acts 24:25 the word follows “righteousness,” which represents God’s claims, self-control being man’s response thereto; in 2 Pet. 1:6, it follows “knowledge,” suggesting that what is learned requires to be put into practice. (VINE)

As Vine notes, “*self-control*” is the preferable rendering of *egkrateia*. This translation is good, though the thought involves implications important for us to understand. In what way does one who employs *egkrateia* control himself? Strong mentions “continence” and “temperance.” In referencing “temperance,” Vine is correct in noting it as a limited form of self-control (concerning consuming alcohol). The same is true for “continence” (concerning sexual activity). BDAG notes

the broadness of the field in which self-control is exercised – emotions, impulses, or desires. Thayer does the same in mentioning desires, passions, and sensual appetites. These are not problematic, nor sinful, but are a part of our design by God. Self-control restrains them lest they exceed their God-ordained boundary.

This self-control is not an arbitrary practice but is the proper response of gaining knowledge from God. When Felix sent for Paul to hear from him concerning the faith in Christ, Luke records that Paul *“reasoned about righteousness, self-control (egkrateia), and the judgment to come”* (Acts 24:25). *“Righteousness”* would not simply include the concept, but the precise standard as it relates to *“the faith in Christ.”* To submit to the *“righteousness of God”* (cf. Romans 10:3) there is the need for *“self-control.”* The *“judgment to come”* will be in consideration of the self-control regarding righteousness, or lack thereof. So, in connection with the *“knowledge”* of Christ and His will we are to add *“self-control.”*

THE NATURE OF MAN

The consideration of *“self-control”* beckons us to reflect on the nature of man. Most in the religious world take the position that there is an inherent inability within man due to a corrupt nature. Some in the church have been influenced by this erroneous doctrine. The inclusion of *“self-control”* in Peter’s list is at odds with a thought of inherent depravity of the flesh.

God created man in His image (cf. Genesis 1:26), but it is not our flesh which bears the image of God. Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, *“God is Spirit”* (John 4:24). The record in Genesis manifests the duality of man – *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Genesis 2:7). When Adam could not find a helper comparable to him (cf. Genesis 2:18-20), it was not merely due to an incompatibility of physical form with the other members of creation, but the missing image of God. Eve, though differing from Adam, was the exact same insofar as being spiritual – created in the image of God. Mankind is unique, for like the beasts of the field he was created from the dust of the ground (cf. Genesis 1:24; 2:7), though upon his demise his spirit will return to God who gave it (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Unlike the rest of creation, man is presented with a choice. Namely, will he live life according to his flesh, or will he live a spiritual life in pursuit of God? The flesh itself is not sinful (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:29), otherwise, when Christ *“likewise shared in the same”* (Hebrews 2:14) by partaking of flesh and blood He also partook of sin. Yet, Christ was sinless (cf. Hebrews 4:15; 7:27). The flesh merely poses a challenge when one is confronted by the will of God. Paul noted, *“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”* (Galatians 5:16-17). *“Lust”* is translated from the

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Greek, *epithymia*, and simply means “a longing” (STRONG). The longing itself is not sin, but when the longing of the flesh is against the Spirit of God, and the longing of the Spirit of God is against the flesh, the longing of the flesh must be restrained. To fail is to sin.

Jesus was sent “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3). This must be understood in harmony with the rest of scripture. He was flesh as are we (cf. Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 4:2-3), and that is still called “*sinful flesh*.” In what way is it “*sinful flesh*?” It is prone to sin. This does not mean it is inherently defiled by sin. Nor does this mean a choice does not exist, but that the flesh contains several factors which, if unchecked by the direction of God, will lead one to sin. Man is equipped by God with emotions, impulses, passions, desires, and appetites. These were given by God to be presented to Him in service (cf. Romans 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If they are not brought under the reign of God’s word they will lead to sin. So, one must exercise *egkrateia*, “*self-control*,” and put his body and spirit in subjection to God.

THE ROLE OF REVELATION

God revealed His will through the Holy Spirit so that man could fulfill his created purpose (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). As noted, the Spirit reveals positive commands and restrictions which conflict with the urges of the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:17). Paul proceeds to give specific restrictions concerning the works of the flesh, and specific requirements concerning the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:19-23). He then presents his readers with the implications of their choice to follow Christ – “*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*” (Galatians 5:24-25). If we claim to be Christ’s, should we not be walking in line with His teaching by the Spirit?

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Self-control is to be exercised in conjunction with the knowledge of the Spirit’s revelation. When one desires to do God’s will, he must deny himself the urges of the flesh and submit to God (cf. Mark 8:34-38). He must be mindful of the spiritual, or the spiritual revelation of God will not appeal to him (cf. Romans 8:5-8). Paul explains, “*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God,*

for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He must first choose to lead a spiritual life according to his spiritual nature before he can rightly discern the revelation of God. Then, by God’s direction, he will control himself accordingly.

THE RESPONSE OF SELF-CONTROL (EGKRATEIA)

In our text, “*self-control*” is in response to the invitation and promise to be “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Because God has promised this, we add to our faith the goal of moral excellence (virtue), and to that we add the knowledge necessary to reach that goal. Our aim for something greater and eternal leads to “*self-control.*” Others think it

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strange that we keep ourselves from such temporal satisfaction (cf. 1 Peter 4:3-4). They do not know self-control because they have no reason to. If their aim was as our own, they would not give themselves to such indulgences.

Yet the aim for fellowship with God, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom (cf. 2 Peter 1:11) does not make “*self-control*” an automatic occurrence. It must be decided upon and developed. “*Self-control*” requires:

1. **Humility:** James sought to bring his readers to terms with their role in temptation. Temptation is an act of Satan to accuse us before God (cf. Revelation 12:9-10), but it is also a personal problem. Temptation is being drawn away by one’s own desires (cf. James 1:13-15). We need to acknowledge our weakness. What tempts me? Brutal honesty is necessary to develop self-control.
2. **Self-denial:** Jesus demonstrated the heart of self-control when confronted by Peter. When his disciple rebuked Him for speaking of His suffering, Jesus told him his mind was on the things of men, not God (cf. Matthew 16:21-23). This contrasted with Jesus’ mindset to fulfill His Father’s will. His application in the following verses was a challenge for His disciples to do the same thing He was doing (cf. Matthew 16:24-28). Allowing God’s will to gain ascendancy over our own is key in developing self-control.
3. **Self-discipline:** Using a sports metaphor, Paul noted, “*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things*” (1 Corinthians 9:25, NASB). He then demonstrated what self-control looks like – “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection*” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul utilized violent language to describe the measures necessary to achieve self-control. In acknowledgment of our vain desires we must defeat ourselves lest we forfeit the true prize.

LESSON 7 QUESTIONS

1. What connection does “*self-control*” have with the preceding “*knowledge?*”
2. Explain “*self-control.*” What is it about self that requires control?
3. Why does the discussion of “*self-control*” require a consideration of the nature of man? What is an error regarding the nature of man that is contrary to the idea of “*self-control?*”
4. If the flesh is not inherently sinful, what challenge does it present to man?
5. Explain Paul’s description of flesh as “*sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3). Did Christ partake of flesh?
6. What role does the revelation of God have in the concept of “*self-control?*”
7. What promise of God is the basis of our desire to exercise “*self-control?*”
8. What roles do humility, self-denial, and self-discipline play in developing “*self-control?*”