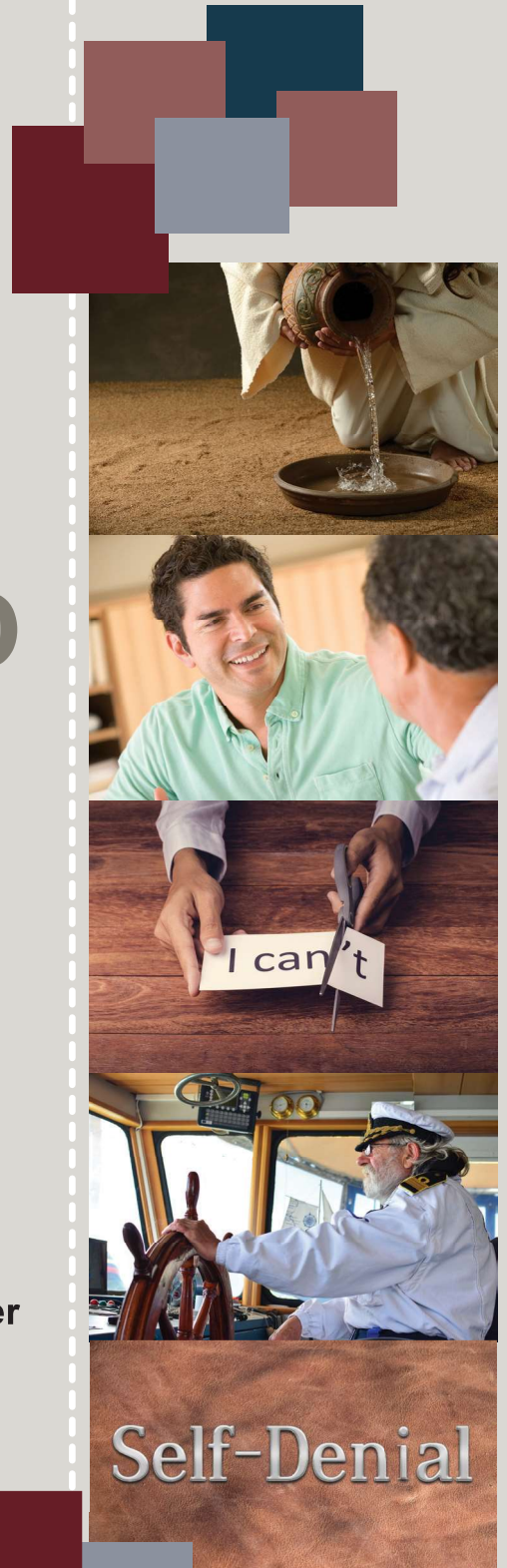
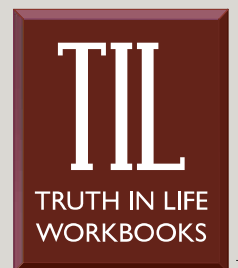
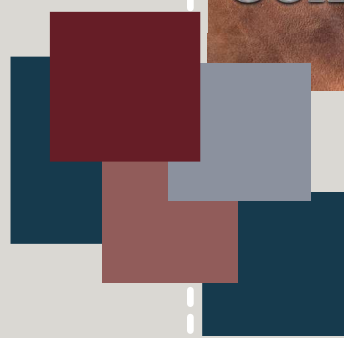


Learning to Deny Self

By Donnie V. Rader



Self-Denial



**Learning to Deny Self
A Study of Self-Discipline**

By Donnie V. Rader



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Introduction

The following lessons explore the idea of learning to deny self. That is what Jesus requires of all his disciples. At the center of all these lessons is Mark 8:34:

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

The more I study God's word and experience life, the more I realize that self-denial (or the lack of it) is at the heart of all things. These lessons, though simple as they are, will get to the root of all our problems. I can't think of a sin or problem (that is self-inflicted) that doesn't

involve a lack of self-control. I can't think of any principle of righteousness or good trait that doesn't involve self-discipline in some way.

As you study the following pages over the next thirteen weeks, think of this material as a "self-help" handbook. Only when we make application to ourselves will the material be of any use. If we grow in self-denial, we will also grow in all areas of life (including attitudes, marriage, finances, business management, proper worship, living godly, health and happiness).

All quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

— Donnie V. Rader

Self-denial (or the lack of it) is at the heart of all things.

Lesson 1

What Is Self-Denial?

Jesus said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). Self-denial is one of the basic attributes of Christianity. Yet, it is one of the most difficult to attain. One reason for that is because it requires great strength of will.

Man has a great problem mastering himself. Those who willfully engage in sin have not learned to control themselves.

Man has a great problem mastering himself. Those who willfully engage in sin have not learned to control themselves. Those who are overcome in a moment of temptation have a problem (at least for the moment) with self-control. When we get angry, let our tempers flare and our words fly, our character is then flawed due to not practicing self-discipline. We exhibit a lack of will power when we overeat, are lazy, or are addicted to alcohol, tobacco, or some other drug. Thus, denying self requires constant work for all of us. The difference in us is that we may need to work on it in different areas of our lives.

Shakespeare wrote, “Brave Conquerors! for so you are, that war against your own affections and the huge army of the world’s desires.” John Sterling said, “The worst education which teaches self-denial is better than the best which teaches everything else, and not that.”

There are more passages that imply the principle of self-denial than we may think at first. To learn and grow in self-denial is to grow in heart, in soul, and in character. This is one quality that we can use every moment of every day in every place.

Let’s Define Self-Denial.

1. Different words used in the New Testament. There are three different words or phrases used in the Bible that point to the same concept of denying or controlling self.

- a. Jesus used the phrase “deny himself” (Mark 8:34).
- b. The NKJV uses the words “self- control” in 2 Peter 1:6 and Titus 1:8.
- c. The word “temperance” or “temperate” is used in the KJV in 2 Peter 1:6, 1 Corinthians 9:25, and Titus 2:2.

2. “Deny self ” means “to forget oneself, lose sight of oneself and one’s own interest” (Thayer 54). Literally it means to say “No!” to yourself. It is hard to say “no” to others, but even harder to say “no” to ourselves.

3. “Temperance” means “self government” (Thayer). Strong’s says the original word translated “temperance” comes from a word that means “to be strong in a thing (i.e., masterful).” It means dominion, power or strength. Thus, temperance means to have power or dominion over self. William Barclay suggests that it is the “ability to take a grip of oneself.”



Self-Denial

4. Aristotle proposed that there are four states of man with reference to the battle between reason and passion.

- a. *Perfect Temperance*: This is where reason rules over passion. The fight is won.
- b. On the other end of the spectrum is *unbridled lust*: This is where passion rules over reason. The fight is lost. In between these two states is where the battle within ourselves takes place.
- c. *Incontinence*: This is where reason fights, but passion prevails. The battle is on, but at the moment, reason is losing.
- d. *Self-Control*: This is where passion fights against reason, but reason prevails. The battle is still on, but at the moment, reason is winning. (Taken from Barclay in his comments on 2 Pet. 1:6.)

Four States in the Battle between Reason and Passion

- Perfect Temperance
- Unbridled Lust
- Incontinence
- Self-Control

—Aristotle

The Reality of Life

The principle of self-denial or self-control deals with the reality of life. The Bible does not picture the Christian void of all passion, drained of all desires, or detached from all temptation. Rather, it envisions that all of his appetites and desires remain, but he keeps them under control and mastery. With self-control, man becomes the master and not the slave of his passions.

Questions

1. Why does man have a problem mastering himself? _____

2. What are the three different words or expressions that suggests the idea of denying self?

NOTES

3. What does “deny self ” mean? _____

4. What does “temperance” mean? _____

5. Define the state of man known as “perfect temperance.” _____

6. Define the state of man known as “unbridled lust.” _____

7. Define the state of man known as “incontinence.” _____

8. Define the state of man known as “self-control.” _____

9. How does self-denial deal with the reality of life? _____

10. List any practical lessons you learned from this study. _____

Lesson 2

God Demands Self-Denial

Self-denial is not just a suggestion for a better life. It is a command of the Lord. The requirement for self-denial is found in more texts than we may think on the surface. Self-denial is affirmed on nearly every page of the Bible.

Passages That Require Self-Denial

1. Passages that specifically mention self-denial or self-control. Jesus said that those desiring to be his disciple must deny self (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Paul preached to Felix about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25). Peter lists “temperance” as one of the “Christian graces” which we are to add to our faith (2 Pet. 1:6). The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Gal. 5:23). Those who run the race and compete for the crown must be temperate in all things (1 Cor. 9:25). The comparison in this text is that we are to be self-controlled and self-disciplined just as athletes are. (Athletes have will-power and persistence, keep their minds focused, and make themselves do what they may not want to do.) Elders are to have self-control (Titus 1:8) and aged men should be temperate (Titus 2:2).

2. Passages which deal with self-denial and self-control in principle. Paul urged the Romans not to continue in sin (cf. Rom. 6:1) by telling them not to let sin reign in their bodies (Rom. 6:12ff). That requires self-control. The same writer said that it was no longer himself, but Christ who lived in him (Gal. 2:20). He had said “No!” to himself. Those who are God’s people willingly submit to Christ in everything (Eph. 5:24). That implies self-denial.

The greatest battle you will ever fight is fought within yourself.

3. Any passages that forbid the following requires self-control: lust (2 Tim. 2:22; Matt. 5:28), lying (Eph. 4:25), immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), covetousness (Col. 3:5), retaliation (Rom. 12:17-21), laziness (Rom. 12:11; 2 Thess. 3:10), being self-willed (Titus 1:7), and hatred (Gal. 5:20).

4. Any passage that commands the following requires self-control: meekness (Matt. 5:3), gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24), patience (2 Tim. 2:24), soberness (1 Pet. 1:13), contentment (Heb. 13:5), and chastity (Titus 2:5).

In fact, any passage that forbids anything and any passage that commands anything teaches self-denial.

This Is an Area in Which We Need to Grow

The Christian life is a continual growing process. We should always be growing in grace and in knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18). Each day and each year we should be gaining more and more spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:14).

Self-control is a relative matter. That is, there are varying degrees of temperance (self-



control) just as there are with all of the “Christian graces” found in 2 Peter 1:5-10. None is perfect (without a flaw—who cannot grow any more) in temperance. Furthermore, one never will be. The key to being acceptable to God is to work on self-control with “all diligence” (2 Pet. 1:5).

There are some areas of life where this quality is more easily practiced than in others. Easy or not, we must grow in self-control.

The greatest battle you will ever fight is fought within yourself.

Questions

- List some passages that specifically require self-control or self-discipline. _____

- List some passages (and the concepts) that require or deal with self-control in principle.

- How do passages that forbid something deal with self-control?

- How do passages that command something deal with self-control? _____

- What is meant by self-control being a “relative matter.” _____

NOTES

Find the Passage

1. "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." _____
2. "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.'" _____
3. " 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" _____
4. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." _____
5. List any practical lessons you have learned from this study.

Lesson 3**Putting God's Will First (1)**

In the previous lessons we saw that God demands self-denial. Jesus said that one must deny himself to be his follower (Mark 8:34). Part of the principle of self-denial is learning to put God's will first.

In preaching to Felix, Paul taught about "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). What does self-control have to do with becoming a Christian? The answer is everything. One will not and cannot become a child of God until he suppresses his own will and gives preference to the will of God.

Man Has His Own Way

Man has his own idea of how he ought to live and conduct his life. What he thinks seems right to him (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). However, it differs greatly from the thinking of God. His ways are higher and greater than man's (Isa. 55:9-10). Following his own plans, man is led to destruction (Prov. 16:25).

Examples can be found throughout the Bible of those who had their own ideas. When Naaman heard the instructions from the man of God to dip seven times in Jordan, he revealed

his disappointment saying, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper" (2 Kings 5:11). In the days of the judges "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). Paul lived in good conscience while he was persecuting the church (Acts 23:1). The Jews were rejected by God because they ignored God's will and went about to establish their own scheme for being righteous (Rom. 10:1-3).

The Proverbs writer warned, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

God's Will Is Revealed in His Word

The mind of God has been revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets (1 Cor. 2:9-13; Eph. 3:3-5). We can now read and understand what God's will is (Eph. 3:3-5; 5:17; John 8:32). The righteousness of God (God's plan for righteousness) is revealed in the gospel



The Jordan River, in which Naaman first refused to dip seven times.

(Rom. 1:16-17). It is his grace that teaches us how to live (Titus 2:11-12).

We Must Accept God's Will and Put It First

If we are going to serve God, we must suppress our own will and submit to his. Only those who do the will of the Father enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21). Those in the church are those who are subject unto Christ in everything (Eph. 5:24). The word "subject" is a military term that means to "line up under."

If we are going to serve God, we must suppress our own will and submit to his.

The repentance that God demands of us in becoming his children (Acts 2:38; 17:30-31) involves a change of mind (cf. Matt. 21:28-29). This is a change from following our own will to submitting to the will of God. Then, it is no longer us, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20).

If we are truly converted to the Lord, we will put the Lord first (cf. "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," 1 Pet. 3:15) in all things. Thus, it is not just a matter of submitting to the will of the Lord

in becoming a Christian, but accepting it in "everything" (Eph. 5:24).

Questions

1. What does self-control have to do with becoming a Christian? _____

2. Cite some examples of those who wanted to follow their own will instead of the will of God.

3. To what does "the righteousness of God" refer (Rom. 1:17)?

NOTES

4. What does the word "subject" mean (Eph 5:24)? _____

5. How does repentance relate to self-control? _____

6. What does "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" mean (1 Pet. 3:15)? _____

7. We are to subject ourselves unto the Lord in _____

8. We must learn to _____ our own will and _____
_____ to the _____ of God.

9. Write Mark 8:34 from memory. _____

10. What practical lesson(s) have you learned from this study?

Lesson 4

Putting God's Will First (2)

In part one of this study we saw that man must learn to suppress his own will and yield to the will of God. That's part of denying self. Those who do not obey God, whether the alien who refuses to be baptized or the child of God who refuses to live right, have not denied themselves.

Reasons for Putting God's Will First

1. God is smarter than we are. God's ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). Who among men is wise enough or smart enough to give God counsel, telling him that he has a better way (Rom. 11:34)?

2. Our way leads to death. Though what we think seems right and feels good, it leads to separation from God and eternal damnation (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

3. God's will is for our good. We do not always see how some command or restriction that God has laid upon us can be for our good. However, his commands are for our good always (Deut. 6:24).

4. If we do not submit to God's will, we are against God. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matt. 12:30).

5. Man is not qualified to be his own guide. "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Examples

Let's consider some examples of those who put God's will first in their lives.

1. Abraham was so dedicated to doing God's will that he was willing to sacrifice his own son because that's what God told him

to do (Gen. 22). Talk about someone who would have to really suppress his own will—Abraham surely had to do that! It wouldn't be easy for anyone to kill a child he loved.

2. Post-exile Israel had married the strangers from that land in violation of God's law. Ezra preached the will of God to them which said that they must separate from their wives (Ezra 10:9-10). Obviously, that wouldn't be easy. Surely, they loved these women. After all, they had married them. Many of them had children by these wives (v. 44). And yet, as hard and as painful as it would be, they said to Ezra, "As you have said, so we must do" (v. 12).

Those who do not obey God have not denied themselves.



Ancient Corinth was known throughout the ancient world for its immorality. The temple of Aphrodite, that overlooked the city from the Acro-Corinth (pictured here), once had 1000 ritual prostitutes sent down into city below in honor of the goddess.

4. List some other reasons for putting God's will first (other than those in the book): _____

5. List six examples of those who put God's will first in their lives.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

7. What did the Israelites (of the post-exile period) do that shows they suppressed their own will and yielded to God? _____

8. What did the Corinthians give up that shows they denied themselves? _____

9. Write from memory Proverbs 16:25. _____

10. What practical lessons have you learned from this study? _____

Lesson 5

Defining Meekness

In this part of our study we will focus on meekness as it is a part of the self-denial that Jesus demands (Mark 8:34). Meekness is not easily defined. To say the least, one cannot cite a synonym that fully conveys the idea. To some meekness is synonymous with weakness. Others may think that meekness is a quality over which we have no control. To them, we either have it or we don't.

God demands that we be meek. The meek of the earth were told to seek God (Zeph. 2:3). In contrast to the outward adorning, Peter says that a woman should wear the ornament of a "meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4). Paul urged Timothy to follow after meekness (1 Tim. 6:11). The Colossians were told to put on meekness (Col. 3:12).

Since God commands meekness, it must not involve weakness. Furthermore, that suggests that we have control over whether or not we are meek.

The idea of meekness cannot be expressed with one synonym. There are several ideas involved. W.E. Vine said,

The meaning of *prautes* is not readily expressed in English, for the terms meekness, mildness, commonly used, suggest weakness and pusillanimity to a greater or less extent, whereas *prautes* does nothing of the kind. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a rendering less open to objection than

"meekness"; "gentleness" has been suggested, but as *prautes* describes a condition of mind and heart, and as "gentleness" is appropriate rather to actions, this word is no better than that used in both English versions. It must be clearly understood, therefore, that the meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was "meek" because he had the infinite resources of God at His command. Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all (Vines 3:56).

Meekness is not easily defined. One cannot cite a synonym that fully conveys the idea.

1. The lexicons. Thayer defines the word translated "meekness" as "gentleness, mildness" (535). Bauer says it means, "gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness" (699). Vine says, "It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with the word *tapeinophrosune* (humility), and follows directly upon it. . . . This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of His elect. . . . In Gal. 5:23 it is associated with *enkrateia*, self-control" (3:55-56).



Meekness

2. The dictionaries. Funk and Wagnall define “meekness” as “of gentle and longsuffering disposition, submissive, compliant, humble” (792). American Heritage Dictionary says the word “meek” means “showing patience and humility; gentle . . . submissive” (782).

3. Other writers. Barclay states that our term was “. . . used of animals which have been tamed and which have learned to accept discipline and control” (*Flesh and Spirit* 113-114). Barnes wrote, “Meekness relates to the manner in which we receive injuries. We are to bear them patiently, and not to retaliate or seek revenge” (*Barnes Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* 71).

William Hendriksen commenting on Ephesians 4:2 said, “The mention of lowliness leads naturally to that of meekness. The meek individual is slow to insist on his rights . . . With Abraham he prefers to let Lot have first choice (Gen. 13:7-18), with great reward . . . for Abraham (*New Testament Commentary Exposition of Ephesians* 183).

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. remarked, “Meekness is often mistaken for passivity, timid reticence and a sort of an inferiority complex. But the ba-



sic element of meekness, derived from its root meaning, is equilibrium—the full and complete possession of all the faculties of one’s being, and inner mastery. It has been illustrated in some lexical definitions as the captain at the helm of his ship in the midst of the storm, who, in full control of the vessel, guides the ship steadily through the storm” (*The Sermon on the Mount* 16).

4. A summary. From all of the above we conclude that meekness involves: (a) humility toward God and man, (b) submission to God’s will, (c) accepting the discipline we receive, (d) gentleness and mildness, and (e) self-control or inner mastery or strength.

Questions

1. Why is meekness hard to define? _____

NOTES

2. List some synonyms of “meekness.” _____

3. Cite three passages that show that God demands that one be meek. _____

4. How would you show that meekness is not to be equated with weakness? _____

5. Summarize Foy Wallace’s comments on meekness. _____

6. Barclay says meekness is used of _____
_____ which have been
_____ and which have
learned _____

and _____.
7. Barnes suggests that meekness relates to the manner in which we _____
_____.
8. In your own words define “meekness.” _____

9. Give a dictionary definition of meekness. Use your own dictionary rather than the one given in the lesson. _____

10. List any practical lessons you learn from this study. _____

Lesson 6

Examples of Meekness

There are two notable cases of meekness in the Bible. This is not to say that these are the only cases. Obviously, they are not. However, these two are cases where the word “meekness” is used.

Moses

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3, ASV, KJV). The NKJV uses the word “humble” here. The characteristics of Moses’ meekness were:

- He suffered patiently those who opposed him (Num. 12:1-15; 16:1-50).
- He controlled himself (Num. 12:1-15). There is no indication that Moses “flew off” and got mad.
- He was submissive to God (Exod. 34:1, 4).
- He was humble (Exod. 4:10).
- Yet, he was a man of courage and strength (Exod. 32:19-21).

Jesus

Jesus said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29; cf. Matt. 21:5 [ASV & KJV] and 2 Cor. 10:1). Jesus, like Moses, demonstrated the qualities of meekness.

- He was submissive to the will of his Father (Matt. 26:39, 42).
- He suffered patiently (1 Pet. 2:21-23).
- He dealt gently with sinners and his enemies (Luke 23:34).

There are two notable examples of meekness in the Bible: Moses and Jesus.

- He was humble (Phil. 2:6-8).
- He was not spineless, but firmly dealt with sinners with righteous indignation (Matt. 23; John 2:13-17).

Other examples in both the Old and New Testaments can be found. Though the word “meek” may not be used to describe them, they were meek if they had the qualities of meekness.

Having seen what meekness is and how it worked in the lives of Moses and Jesus, we will next consider how it applies to our lives.



Questions

1. What qualities did Moses have that made him meek? _____

2. What qualities did Jesus have that made him meek? _____

3. List some other Old Testament characters who were meek and give their qualities. _____

4. List some other New Testament characters who were meek and give their qualities. _____

5. What opposition did Moses face? _____

NOTES

Find the Passage

1. "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." _____
2. "Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'" _____
3. "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you." _____
4. "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (KJV). _____
5. What practical conclusions do you draw from these examples of meekness? _____

Lesson 7

How to Apply Meekness (1)

Previously we have defined meekness and considered the passages that demand that we be meek as the Lord was meek. In this study we will list some areas wherein we need to apply meekness. Remember that meekness involves: (a) humility toward God and man, (b) submission to God's will, (c) accepting the discipline we receive, (d) gentleness and mildness, and (e) self-control or inner mastery or strength.

Receive the Word with Meekness

James wrote, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

This means that we will accept and do what the word says. We will not question and doubt. We will believe and do. None of us is wise enough to sit in judgment on God and question what his word says (Rom.

11:34). Therefore, with meekness (humility and submission) we accept what God says.

It is not uncommon to see people who pass what the word of God says through the process of human reasoning, to see if they think it is acceptable or not. If it doesn't fit their own wisdom, they reject it. That doesn't just happen among the denominations either!

One who is meek is teachable. He is willing to listen and be taught. He has an open mind (Acts 17:11). One who is meek never resents being shown the truth.

Teach with Meekness

Paul instructed the young preacher Timothy saying, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, IN MEEKNESS instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:24-25, emphasis mine DVR).

As we give our defense for our faith, we are to do so with meekness. Peter said, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

One who seeks to teach others must himself submit to the message that is taught (1 Tim. 4:16). The Jews didn't have much success in trying to change the Gentiles while they were guilty of

the same sins they condemned (Rom. 2).

He must not be an arrogant, know-it-all as he seeks to instruct others. Rather, he must be open to learning himself. One who teaches must not be condescending or talk down to those he teaches. We must not confuse confidence, as a teacher, with arrogance. We must be confident of our ability as well as the message. But that is not necessarily arrogance.

Furthermore, as we teach we may have to endure some hardness as a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3). There will be times we will take a little



heat for what we have taught. Learning to bear with that is part of meekness.

The use of some tact and gentleness makes our teaching more effective than a “cram-it-down-your-throat” approach.

Correct Sin with Meekness

When a brother or sister is guilty of sin, those who are spiritual are instructed to “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). As we go to our fellow Christian, we cannot approach him with a

As we go to our fellow Christian, we cannot approach him with a “better-than-thou” (self-righteous) attitude.

“better-than-thou” (self-righteous) attitude. We cannot afford to look down our noses at him as to say, “How dare you to be guilty of sin.”

Our approach will be more successful if we: (1) are humble, (2) realize it could happen to us, (3) don’t leave the impression that we think we are guiltless (1 John 1:8), and (4) show our love and compassion. This doesn’t suggest that we take a soft approach in dealing with sin. It just means that we deal with it and the sinner with a spirit of meekness.

Questions

1. What does meekness involve? _____

2. How does meekness apply to receiving the word? _____

3. How does meekness apply to teaching? _____

4. How does meekness apply to correcting sin? _____

NOTES

5. If we are meek, we will accept and do what the word says. We will not _____

_____ and

_____.

We will _____ and

_____.

6. What does it mean to pass the word “through the process of human reasoning”? _____

7. List some qualities that one might have who attempts to teach, but is not meek. _____

8. What is the difference in “confidence” and “arrogance”? _____

9. As we seek to correct others, our approach will be more successful if we:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

10. List any practical lessons you have learned from this lesson.

Lesson 8

How to Apply Meekness (2)

In Lesson 7 we saw that we must receive the word, teach others, and correct sin with meekness. This lesson continues to explore how to apply meekness in our lives.

Deal with Problems and Disagreements with Meekness

In Ephesians Paul urges all Christians to strive toward unity. In the fourth chapter he mentions some of the attitudes that will help promote unity. He writes, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3).

Problems and disagreements can disrupt the unity that a local church enjoys. If we all had meekness in dealing with church problems and disagreements, few if any divisions would occur. With meekness the first question will always be "What does the Lord want?" or "What is right?" The question will not be, "What do I want?" With meekness we will control our tongues (Jas. 1:19,

26). The tongue causes many, if not most, of the problems and disagreements in local churches.

James tells us that division and strife come from our own lust and a self-seeking spirit (Jas. 3:14-4:2). It is interesting that this discussion starts in the same chapter that deals with the misuse of the tongue. James also points out that where this spirit exists, there is confusion and every evil thing (v. 16).

If we all had meekness in dealing with church problems and disagreements, few if any divisions would occur.

With meekness we will not insist on our "rights." Rather, we will waive those rights for the sake of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 9). With meekness, we will not easily come to blows with those with whom we disagree.

See the Appendix: "Dealing With Others."

Meekness as a Characteristic of Our Whole Life

Meekness is not merely a "tool" that we pull out when we are teaching or being taught, etc. It is a quality that should characterize our life. All Christians, not just some, should be meek. The fruit of the spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). All Christians are instructed to "put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3:12).

In another lesson we will focus on temperance and see areas wherein we need to apply it.



Questions

1. How does meekness apply to dealing with problems and disagreements among brethren?

2. How does meekness relate to our whole life? _____

3. When we are meek it will not be a matter of what _____

want, but what _____

_____ wants.

4. How do our "rights" relate to meekness? _____

5. What is the root of most church problems? (Be prepared to explain in class). _____

6. How does one "put on . . . meekness" (Col. 3:12)? _____

NOTES

7. Think of some other passages (and principles) that show we should use meekness in dealing with problems and disagreements. Remember these passages may not (and probably will not) have the word "meekness" in them. _____

8. List some other areas (besides those that are listed in lessons 7 and 8) wherein we should apply meekness? _____

9. For class discussion: Why are some Christians not meek?

10. List any practical lessons you have learned from lesson 8.

Lesson 9

Temperance (1)

God's word instructs us to be temperate. It is one of the "Christian graces" that is to be added as we grow in grace and in knowledge.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance. . . (2 Pet. 1:5-6).

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things (1 Cor. 9:25).

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience (Titus 2:2).

Temperance is self-control. In fact, some translations use that expression in the above passages. A.T. Robertson suggests that it comes from a word describing one "holding himself in" (*Word Pictures of the New Testament*, on-line edition).

Passages like the above tell us that we can (and we must) control ourselves. Furthermore, they tell us that we can make ourselves do what we know we need to do. One who says, "I know I need to. . ." but doesn't, is not temperate. Temperance is a general principle that applies in many areas. Let's see the things that temperance is essential to and what life would be like without it.

Temperance Is Essential to. . .

1. Becoming a Christian (Acts 24:25).
One cannot even obey the gospel unless and



until he denies his own will and yields to the will of God. That involves controlling self. Repentance involves ceasing things that are contrary to God. That involves self-control.

2. Basic happiness (Matt. 5:5). Those who are truly happy are those who place restraints on themselves. Sometimes, young people think that if they can ever get out from under their parents' rule, they will be able to really enjoy life. They think that if they can live without any control, life would be fun. Not so. True happiness comes only when we learn to master ourselves.

3. Unity (Eph. 4:1-3). In this text Paul lays down several attitudes that are essential to have unity. He says, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." These cannot be attained without self-control.

Temperance

To maintain unity, we must control our tongues, reactions, impressions, anger and wants.

4. Living pure (Titus 2:12). God's grace teaches us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lust." We must say "No!" to these in order to live pure. That requires self-control. Do you realize that every sin involves a lack of self-control? Thus, temperance is essential to living pure.

5. A happy marriage. Self denial is essential to harmony in the home. I can't think of a marriage problem that doesn't involve a lack of self-denial or self-control. Immorality, nagging, lack of communication, lack of love, being inconsiderate and not understanding one another are all due to a lack of self-control.

Several years ago I saw a book about solving marital problems. I haven't seen a copy of it since. I've wished several times I had bought a copy of it then. Throughout the book various problems in marriage were listed and explained. Then, below that, the answer to the problem was given. As I thumbed through a copy, I noticed that every problem was given the same basic answer: Mark 8:34. That passage deals with self-denial. At the time I

thought the approach was quiet simple, so I didn't buy a copy. However, I have thought about that simple approach many times. The more I think about it the more I realize how much self-denial is a factor in a happy marriage. As I see people with marriage problems, I can quickly identify that either one or both are not denying themselves.

With self-control it will not be a matter of how my mate can please me, but how I can please my mate. It will not involve how my mate can be better, but how I can be a better mate. It will not be a matter of what I want, but what my mate wants.

Self denial is essential to harmony in the home.

Without Temperance . . .

Can you image what life would be like if we threw temperance out the window? We would follow our own desires and pleasures. But, then, so would others, which might cause harm to us. We would be selfish. We would live like beasts. Unhappiness would fill our lives. Our relationships would turn sour. Our spirituality, our health, our finances, our self-esteem, and our jobs would suffer. Satan would take over and reign in our lives (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5).

Questions

1. Define temperance. _____

NOTES

2. List some passages that require temperance. _____

3. How does temperance relate to becoming a Christian? _____

4. How does temperance relate to happiness? _____

5. How does temperance relate to unity? _____

6. How does temperance relate to living a pure life? _____

7. How does temperance relate to a happy marriage? _____

8. Describe a marriage problem that could be solved by a dose of Mark 8:34 (self-denial).

9. What would life be like if men did not practice temperance at all? _____

10. List any practical lessons you have learned in lesson 9. _____

Lesson 10

Temperance (2)

In lesson 9 we saw that temperance is essential to becoming a Christian, basic happiness, unity, living pure, and a happy marriage. We also saw how chaotic life would be without temperance. In this study we want to consider some areas wherein temperance is needed and look at some misconceptions about it.

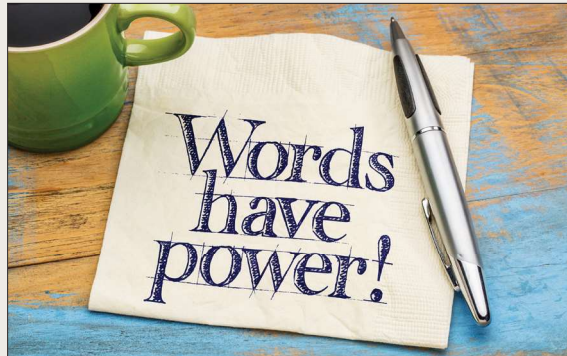
Temperance Is Needed in . . .

Temperance must be applied in all areas of life. I wonder if we don't limit the idea of temperance to our temper or tongue. Certainly, these must be controlled. However, there are many areas wherein we must apply self-control.

1. Our temper. The Proverb writer said, "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly" (14:17). Just twelve verses later he said, "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly" (v. 29). The same book states, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (16:32). Again, "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" (25:28). We can and must control our anger, our fits and our tantrums.

2. Our pride. We must control what we think about ourselves. Paul urged all men not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Rom. 12:3; cf. v. 16).

3. Our words. While the tongue is hard to control, it is not impossible to handle. We must be slow to speak (Jas. 1:19). If we do not bridle our tongue, our religion is empty and vain (v. 26). The fact that Paul accused some of "saying things which they ought not" (1 Tim. 5:13) suggests that we must control the tongue. In the Proverbs we read, "He who has knowledge spares his words" (Prov. 17:27). Before we speak we should ask: Is it true? Is it nice? What purpose does it serve? Is there a better



way to say it? Could I be misunderstood? Is this something that is confidential?

4. Our thoughts. Not only our words, but even our thoughts must be put into subjection to the Lord (2 Cor. 10:5). While some say, "I can't help what I think," we can and must control our thoughts. Controlling our thoughts means we must: (a) cease lustful and immoral fantasies (Matt. 5:28; 2 Tim. 2:22; Prov. 6:25), (b) fight bitterness (Jas. 3:14), (c) be forgiving (Eph. 4:32), and (d) be optimistic (Phil. 4:8, 13).

5. Our reactions. We cannot retaliate when we have been wronged. We must treat others right whether or not they do so to us. Jesus set us an example of controlling our reactions, "when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten" (1 Pet. 2:23). Remember what Jesus said about those who put him on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

6. Our will. We have previously noted that we must yield our will to the will of God in order to become Christians (Acts 24:25). Paul exemplified temperance in his will, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

7. Our opinions. While we may be entitled to hold to our own opinions, we must not bind that which is not a part of divine revelation on others (Rom. 14:22). Thus, we must exercise self-control.

8. Our buying and spending. Many live in debt and struggle with financial difficulties simply because they do not curb their desire to buy and spend. Money problems are involved in a lot of marriage difficulties. We must be careful about how much we owe. We cannot afford to get to the point that we cannot pay our debts (Rom. 13:8). A lot of what we buy is bought simply because it is what we want. The impulsive buyer does not exercise temperance.



9. Anything that might be a hindrance to us. That applies even to things right within themselves (1 Cor. 6:12). Whether it be sports, a romance, or a job that could little by little lead me away from my diligent service to the Lord, I must be in control.

10. General self-discipline (self-help). Temperance (self-control) means that I make myself do what I know I need to do. If not, then how

could we practice self-control? Thus, it includes (a) making myself study the Bible without being forced to prepare, lest I be embarrassed in class, (b) working without a boss or time-clock, (c) taking care of my body (using some will power), and (d) controlling my time and not wasting it.

Misconceptions about Temperance

It is not unusual for someone to do something like letting his temper flare and then justify it on the basis of “That’s just my nature” or “I just can’t help it, that’s just the way I am.” A lack of self-control may be your “nature” in the sense that it is something you have developed and learned. However, it is not something beyond your ability to control. Since the Bible demands self-control, we can help what we think, say and do.

Quite often we hear someone say, “I just don’t have any will-power.” This sounds as if one can’t help it. It suggests that some have will-power and others don’t, just like some are tall and some are short. Sometimes we hear, “I just can’t get motivated to. . . .” You can’t? Would \$100 or \$1000 help motivate you? Yes, we can get motivated. The question is whether or not we will motivate ourselves.

That’s what self-denial is all about. Thus, if we don’t have any will-power, it is because we haven’t tried to develop and use it.

Conclusion

We can and must control ourselves. Real self-control will not just say “We should. . . .” but, “We will. . . .” In the next two lessons we will consider how to develop self discipline.

NOTES

Questions

1. List any other areas wherein temperance needs to be applied? _____

2. How does temperance apply to our opinions? _____

3. How does temperance apply to our buying and spending? _____

4. How does temperance apply to our thoughts? _____

5. How does temperance apply to our reactions? _____

6. For class discussion: How does temperance relate to general self-discipline? Be prepared to discuss some specifics. _____

7. List some other misconceptions about temperance than those mentioned in this lesson? _____

8. How does our "will-power" relate to the command to be temperate? _____

9. How does temperance relate to things that hinder our service to God (i.e., a job, romance, or sports, etc.)? _____

10. List any practical lessons you learn from lesson 10. _____

Lesson 11

How to Develop Self-Discipline (1)

Jesus said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). This study has been about learning to deny ourselves—learning to control or master ourselves. We have seen that God demands self-denial. We saw that we must suppress our will and put God’s will first. We learned that meekness is a part of denying ourselves and we saw how to apply it in our lives. We looked at the principle of temperance and how it applies in so many areas of life.

In this lesson and the next, let’s consider how we can develop self-discipline.

Begin with an “I Can” Attitude

The apostle Paul had an “I can” attitude. He said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). This is not an all-inclusive PMA statement. Rather, in context, Paul is saying that he can do what God expects of him. He can live with or live without some of the pleasures of life. He can abound or be abased. In application, I learn that I can fulfill any command, bear any trial, perform any duty, meet any temptation, and live in any circumstance with Christ.

Since God expects me to control myself, then I can do it. I can say “No.” I can refrain. I can bridle my tongue. I can quit what I know to be wrong. I can make myself do what I know I need to do (Jas. 4:17). I can do without some things that I may desire and want. I can overcome habits and practices that I have learned and developed.



One who begins with a defeatist attitude will not make the effort to discipline self. When facing a challenge, some will say things like, “I don’t know. . . . I’ll try, but I don’t think I can do it.” Or, “It is hard for me to. . . .”

If we begin with the attitude that we can control ourselves, then that leads to an “I will” attitude (cf. Heb. 6:3). That involves determination. With those attitudes we will master self.

Refuse to Dwell on What You Need to Deny

Too often we dwell on things that we don’t need, can’t afford or can’t do. We spend time thinking about how we would like to get even with someone, knowing all the while that we cannot. We may focus on the fun we are missing by living right. We may think about things we would like to say that we shouldn’t. Ungodly fantasies may camp in our minds. We must realize that it is hard to “window shop” without either buying something or making ourselves miserable.

Self-Discipline

The answer is simply to control our thinking. Outward sin comes from our thoughts (Matt. 15:19). The point is: stop your thoughts before they lead to sin. Lustful thoughts can lead to adultery (2 Sam. 11; Matt. 5:28). Bitterness and hatred can lead to murder (1 John 3:15).

This principle includes thinking on things that are sinful. We are to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12).

It also includes things right within themselves like: (1) material things beyond our reach (Phil. 4:11; Heb. 13:5), (2) something the doctor has forbidden, or (3) anything to the excess.

Think before You Act

Joseph is a classic example of this (Gen. 39). When tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he thought about: (1) the sin and wickedness involved and (2) the trust that Potiphar had in him. His thinking led to his control of self.

David said, “I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies” (Ps. 119:59).

Some questions need to be raised (especially in the midst of temptation) to help us learn to exercise self-control: (1) Is this how God wants me to respond? (2) Am I yielding to my own desires or to the desires of God? (3) Will I be controlling myself in this? (4) Should I say this? Does it serve any good purpose? (5) Is this what I need? (6) Can I afford this? (7) Can I do without this? (8) Will I be ashamed after I do

this? (9) Will I regret my actions later? (10) Would I want my children and other family members to know if I do this?

It follows that if all sin comes from the wrong thoughts, then right thoughts lead to right actions (Matt. 15:19). That is one of the reasons why Paul wrote, “Finally,

brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

It follows that if all sin comes from the wrong thoughts, then right thoughts lead to right actions (Matt. 15:19).

Questions

1. In view of its context, what is the point of Philippians 4:13?

NOTES

2. What is the "I can" attitude? _____

3. An "I can" attitude leads to an " _____ " attitude.
4. Where does all sin begin? _____
5. List some things we should not think and dwell upon that may be right within themselves.

6. What should we think about before we act? _____

Find the Passage

1. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." _____
2. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." _____
3. "And this we will do if God permits." _____
4. List any practical lessons you have learned from this study.

Lesson 12

How to Develop Self-Discipline (2)

In lesson 11 we saw that to develop self-discipline we must begin with an “I can” attitude, refuse to dwell on what we need to deny, and think before we act. In this lesson we continue with how to develop self-discipline.

Recognize God’s Avenues for Fulfilling Your Desires

Desires and temptations are not wrong. Jesus was tempted, but he did not yield (Heb. 4:15). Desire for some things is natural. What we must realize is that God has a proper way for fulfilling legitimate desires.

Man has the desire to eat. God’s way of fulfilling that desire is that man should work so he can have food to eat (2 Thess. 3:10). His desire to eat should not cause him to violate Bible principles. He can’t steal his food. He must not be a glutton.

Man has a natural sex drive. However, he cannot fulfill that desire any way he chooses. Rather, God’s plan is for that to be fulfilled within the honor of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-9; Heb. 13:4; Prov. 5).

We have desires to deal with or react to things that are said and done to us. Yet, God has a way for us to handle that. If someone has committed a crime against us, we are told, “do not avenge yourselves” (Rom. 12:19). The next chapter shows that God has a way of dealing with that through the civil government (Rom. 13:1-7).

The point is that our desires have to be controlled or channeled.

If we think of ourselves as stewards of all that we have, we can develop the self-control that we need.

View Yourself as a Steward

We all are stewards (1 Cor. 4:2; Luke 12:42). That means that God has entrusted us with a number of things in life. We are given the responsibility to properly manage them for God. We are stewards of our life, our money, and our time.

If we think of ourselves as stewards (who will give an account) of all that we have, we can develop the self-control that we need.

Remember the Word and What It Says

This is what Jesus did when he was tempted of the devil (Matt. 4:1-11). Joseph did the same thing in recalling that fornication is “great wickedness, and sin against God” (Gen. 39:9). David considered the word as a deterrent to sin.

He said, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).

Thus, we must study the word and ever keep it on our minds. We should meditate on it day and night (Ps. 1:2). Our hearts need to be saturated with the word (Deut.

6:6-9). Then, as we recall what the word says on a particular matter, it helps us develop and exercise self-discipline. We must discipline ourselves to be his disciple.



Questions

1. What is God’s avenue for fulfilling the natural desire to eat?

2. What is God’s avenue for fulfilling the natural sexual drive?

3. What is God’s avenue for handling someone who has committed a crime against us?

4. What is a steward? _____

5. How does stewardship relate to developing self-discipline?

6. How does our Bible knowledge and study of the word relate to self-discipline? _____

NOTES	_____

7. Finish this sentence: God has made us stewards of _____
_____.

8. Desires and temptations are _____, _____. The point is
that our desires have to be _____ or _____.

9. In your own words summarize how to develop self-discipline.

10. List any practical lessons you have learned from this lesson.

Lesson 13**Review**

For twelve lessons we have been learning to deny ourselves. This is what Jesus demanded in Mark 8:34. This review lesson is to tie the lessons together and to remind us of what we have learned.



1. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 1.

2. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 2. _____

3. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 3. _____

4. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 4. _____

5. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 5. _____

6. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 6. _____

7. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 7. _____

8. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 8. _____

9. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 9. _____

10. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 10. _____

11. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 11. _____

12. Write a one or two sentence summary of Lesson 12. _____

Questions

1. What does “deny himself ” (Mark 8:34) mean? _____

2. What were Aristotle’s four states of man? _____

3. What are the four types of passages that require self-denial? _____

4. What is meant by the statement that self-control is a “relative matter”? _____

5. What does self-denial or self-control have to do with becoming a Christian? _____

6. Give some examples of those who put God’s will first. _____

7. What is “meekness”? _____

8. What two examples of meekness do we find in the Bible? _____

9. What characteristics did these two people have that made them meek? _____

10. List some areas wherein we need to be meek. _____

11. What is temperance? _____

12. List some things in which temperance is essential. _____

13. List some areas of our life in which we need temperance. _____

13. What are some basic misconceptions about temperance? _____

14. How would you respond to a Christian who says he has no "will power"? _____

15. How can we develop self-discipline? _____

16. These lessons have stressed over and over that we can and must _____ ourselves
do what we _____ we _____ to do.

17. What is the one thing that has been most impressive to you in this study? _____

Appendix

Dealing with Others

Dealing with others is not always easy. What should I say? How much should I believe of what I hear? Is there another side of the story I've been told? Am I being fair in my dealings with others? These and other questions must be answered.

When we deal with others there is always the potential for differences to arise. When those differences come, it is easy to forget to use some common sense rules in our conflict. We are not always as fair in dealing with those we disagree with as we are in defending ourselves or those with whom we agree.

For some time I have been thinking about how brethren treat one another. I have thought about how many problems are simple misunderstandings. It seems to me that we are not always as careful as we ought to be. As I have thought and talked with others, some basic rules come to mind that we ought to follow.

1. Pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). If there is any time we need wisdom it is when we deal with those with whom we disagree. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to know: (a) how to approach others, (b) what we should say and what we should not reveal, (c) what I should believe, and what I should reject of what I hear, (d) the good that is in other people, and (e) how slow or fast I need to be in my conclusions.

2. Be careful what you say. Any of us could easily get carried away and say things that he would later wish had not been said. The Proverb writer said, "he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19). We must be careful (a) what we say to and about others. It may be information that others have told me in confidence. It may be that the one to whom we give



the information may not honor our request to keep it confidential. Let us be "slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19) knowing that "a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Prov. 11:13). We don't have to tell all we know. "A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man hold them back" (Prov. 29:11).

We must (b) be careful how we choose our words. Let's make sure we are conveying the right idea. If we are not cautious, our words can be like the "piercing of a sword" (Prov. 12:18). We must watch what we say and how we say it. Remember, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

Let us also be careful lest we (c) say something detrimental to others. "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor" (Prov. 11:9; cf. v. 13; 20:19). It is possible that I could be telling things about others when I don't have all the facts. What I say could destroy the name and reputation of others.

3. There are two sides to the story. In some situations there is some fault on both sides. Thus, both of the parties at odds have some legitimate points. However, there are some situations where the two sides are the right side and the wrong side. Still, there are two sides.

The questions I must ask myself are: Am I listening to and believing the wrong side? Am I taking the wrong side? Have I considered the other side of the story? There may be more that I need to know before I draw my conclusions and state them. The proverb writer said, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17). Whoever tells his side first makes it sound good.

4. Don’t jump to conclusions. Too often we take a little information and fill in more gaps than are there. We can easily assume motives that we have no way of knowing. I wonder how often our talk and criticism about others would change if we deleted everything but the real facts that we know.

There may be more that I need to know before I draw my conclusions and state them.

The proverb writer warned, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). Let us not be hasty in our words (Prov. 29:20).

5. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Love “believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). It give a person the benefit of the doubt. That means when a questionable situation arises where you can put more than one construction on it, believe the best. When a problem arises and you can put either a good or bad motive on it, believe the best. After all, don’t you want others to do that with you (Matt. 7:12)?

Yes, these rules are simple. But, with a little application we can avoid a lot of friction and misunderstanding.

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