**Self-Control**

*by Olen Holderby*

Self-control is urged upon us by the Word of God, and for obvious and good reasons. Through many years of working with people in varying situations, I have observed what a lack of self-control can do. Few indeed are the faults of a man that can cause more difficulties than a lack of self-control. Self-control is not to be confused with self-esteem, self-devotion, self-determination, or self-defense. Neither does self-control always suggest independence. Through a study of God's word we can come to understand that self-control is a must for the Christian, and advisable for all. What, then, does God's word teach on this subject?

The word "self-control" comes from a Greek word (*kratos*) meaning "strength." God has given man various powers and these can easily be abused. Proper use depends, to a great extent, upon self-control. In Paul's discourse with Felix (Acts 24:25), "self-control" follows "righteousness" (ASV). In this case, it would seem that the word "righteousness" represents God's claim on man, and "self-control" would be man's response to God's claim. In 2 Pet. 1:6 (ASV) it follows "knowledge," suggesting that what is learned is to be put to practice. Here, it should be noticed, "self-control" is one of nine things of which it is said, "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Paul gives "self-control" as one of the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:23, suggesting, to me, that one who follows the instructions of the Spirit will be practicing self-control. It is used as an adjective in reference to certain individuals: elders (Tit. 1:8), older men (Tit. 2:2), older women (1 Tim. 3:11). In 1 Cor. 9:25, it is used, as a verb, in reference to the athlete with a view of winning the prize. In this passage Paul affirms that he practices "self-control" to win the "incorruptible" crown. These references are enough to clearly establish the fact that "self-control" is required by God, for all who would faithfully serve him. There are three basic areas in which self-control plays an important role: thoughts, words, actions. And, in each case the control can be seen to be both positive and negative.

**Aspects of Life Affected by "Self-Control"**

Control of our thoughts can be seen to be both positive and negative; there are some things that we are not to think and some things which we are to think. Love "thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5) well establishes the negative aspect. In Phil. 4:8, we have fully stated the positive, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Most will recognize that right here is where a great deal of difficulty begins; the thoughts running astray from these divine principles. Jesus, of course, taught this same truth in Mk. 7:20-23.

As it is in the case of our thoughts, so it is with our words. There are some which we should say and some which we ought not to say. The Psalmist said, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psa. 19:14). "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul." These statements of wisdom are in Prov. 18:6-7, and are in excellent parallel with James 3, that excellent New Testament commentary on the proper use of the tongue. The seriousness of proper control of the tongue is well expressed in James 1:26, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." In Christianity, every man is to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). However, it was left to Paul to lay down the crowning principle for all our speaking: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know haw ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6).

The control of our actions is no less important. If the reader will notice such passages as Rom. 12:2; Rom. 14:13; or 1 Thess. 5:22, he easily will notice the negative feature. 1 Thess. 5:21; Eph. 4:1-3; and Phil. 1:27 will just as easily set forth the positive aspects. Every Christian recognizes that there are some things which he should not do and some things which he must do.

**Application**

Having noticed, briefly, some thugs concerning self-control with reference to our thoughts, words, arid actions, we are now ready to state more precisely the application of the meaning of self-control. Self-control is not just refraining from thinking wrong things, but the thinking of right things; it is not just refraining from saying wrong things, but the saying of right things; and, it is not just refraining from doing wrong, but the doing of right. Who, then, has self-control, according to the Bible? It is not an impossible feature, for we are instructed to possess it. Wherever and in whatever circumstances a Christian may find himself, he is under obligation to practice self-control.

According to Rom. 6:16, there are two powers to whom we may yield ourselves to serve. A failure to obey the Lord is to place oneself under the control of Satan. On the other hand, to obey the Lord is to practice the self-control taught in his word. This is why it was stated near the beginning that self-control did not always suggest independence. Soul-saving self-control is submission to God's Word. We need to believe that Word so strongly that we find ourselves in somewhat the same condition as Joseph in Egypt when he saw his brothers for the first time in many years; he "could not refrain himself" (Gen. 45:1). When this is really so, we shall willingly embark upon that never-ending task of maintaining that self-control taught by the Almighty.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Thoughts to Ponder**

Contentment is not based on what you have, but who you are; not what is happening now, but where you are headed eternally; not feelings, but faith; not pride, but principle; not locality, but love; not satisfying present desires, but upholding timeless values; not in multiplying physical relationships, but in cultivating your relationship with your heavenly Father.

Thoughts about the past can take us in different directions. If we learn from them, they help us towards wisdom. If we dwell in them, they take away our hope and our zeal in present action. If we rejoice in them, they help us to be thankful. If we seek to live in them, they lead us to despair. The past was a beginning, the present is where we live, but our hope must always be focused on a future at home with God. [See *Philippians 3:12-21*]sent is where we live, but our hope must always be focused upon a future at home with God.  
5) Good hymns display a precision of poetic technique and expression.  
6) Good hymns turn the heart heavenward.  
  
She noted that writing good hymns was “a matter of looking on the face of God, of worshipping in his presence, of embracing his will, of accepting his cross and living daily under its obedience; then, having learned the disciplines of good writing, of singing his grace.”

When we invest the true biblical love that seeks the best interest of another without regard to self, it is never wasted. Though we may not see the effects now, it is a seed ready to germinate and grow when the heart of the one loved is prepared to receive it. If that heart never reaches preparation, the love we give helps to us dispel bitterness from our own heart and to grow closer to God in character. Love not only serves the one loved, it enriches the soul of the one who loves.