

Dr. Robert Shuler tells of a time when he had been in an auto accident. Nothing major, just a fender bender, but the driver of the other car was so angry that all he could do was swear and use abusive language about the accident. Dr. Shuler says there were many words that he wanted to say in that instance. But what he settled on was, "Mister, God loves you, and I am trying."

That is a good example of self-control in the Christian life. Self-control is one of the Fruits of the Spirit which the apostle Paul lists in Galatians 5:22. Fruits of the Spirit are important characteristics of the Christian life which it is hoped that all Christians will possess and act upon in their life. From now until Christmas, my sermon series will be looking at each one of the Fruits of the Spirit.

Today is self-control. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, talks a lot about freedom in the spirit-filled Christian life. Note, there is tremendous freedom allowed. But of course one must understand that a part of the freedom also revolves around the issue of self-control.

Self-control as is used in the list of the Fruits of the spirit actually means closer to the term, self-mastery. Note how in our text, verse 23 says, You say "I have the right to do anything,"—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Self-control means acting in a way that would be considered loving and considerate. In other words, we exercise self-control in deciding to do a certain action or not to do a certain action because it may be the better way to live in a given situation.

An example would be if you would invite a friend over for dinner who is a strict Vegetarian. Self-control would involve not serving them some dinner with everything cooked in a meat sauce. Or if you know someone is having difficulty with their marital situation, flaunting one's close personal relationship with their spouse with arms around each other while in conversation is not showing self-control and helping that person.

These are examples of this aspect of self-control. They revolve around actions we do that may place something that is tempting and difficult for a person in front of them. Self-control in the Christian life means putting aside one's personal pleasures for the benefit of another person.

It is not surprising to me that Paul found it necessary to teach self-control to new believers in the churches of that region. Many of the converts habitually indulged in every kind of excess. They had no regard to rules of good behavior, and fidelity in marriage. Their culture was one of if it feels good for you, go for it. The same may be said for life where we live today. Today, that same philosophy is present and strong.

A few years ago, a theme that was put forth in advertising was "go for the gusto." Now I am not sure what all the 'gusto' is, but I guessed what the ad meant, and it sure seems like self-indulgence was glorified, and self-control was mummified. Again consider our text and Paul's teaching. You say "I have the right to do anything,"—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Aha, this is where trying to live a Christian life is important for people who have felt a change in their life. When we commit our lives to Jesus, we will want to help others and this may mean avoiding self-indulgences which many of us can name. Most of us, when we get right honest with ourselves, know we can too often be selfish. We know where our self-control could be better.

We need to consider correcting our poor view, otherwise we may become like the person who was not too well liked in the Senate, but who once went up to the famous congressman, Horace Greely and exclaimed. "I am a self-made man." To which Greely replied to a friend standing close by. *"I am glad to hear that, for that relieves God of a great responsibility."*

So what Paul is instructing is that a spirit-filled life involves a person who will have self-mastery over the various emotions and actions that bubble up in our lives. Which takes us to the other dimension of self-control which involves emotions that bubble up inside us.

A great example is the emotion of anger. In other scripture texts, Paul teaches about anger. Basically his teaching comes down to, "*In your anger, do not sin.*" Now note he does not say, don't be angry. Rather he says, "*In your time of anger, do not sin.*" What this means is, when anger stirs up inside us, we should not lose our temper, and say or do something that is harmful. You should be self-controlled, or have a self-mastery over the emotion at the time. You can direct your anger in a proper way. All of us know that as we live life, we will be filled with emotional issues.

Paul never says, don't have the emotions. Rather have your emotions somewhat in control. This is important because too often, when we let emotions rule, it hurts someone else. Even maybe when we cannot see it.

Let me cite for you an example of how someone not controlling their anger hurt others even though, if you asked the reactor, he probably thought the only he hurt was himself. When I play sports, I do it for fun. And yes, I am competitive within any game I play. When I play a sport, I can get frustrated mostly with myself. Golf is a sport I play that can be frustrating.

Well, one time, my brother, myself, my wife, and a friend from high school were out for a round of golf. We were having fun, and none of us was having a particularly good round, but it was nice being out. Until my high school friend miss hit a tee shot badly, which got him so mad that he threw his driver up high into a tree. That action ended up ruining the round for the others of us.

See, although some might think his throwing the club and possibly damaging it only impacted him. But he blew up in anger in such a way that the other 3 of us were uncomfortable after that. Self-mastery over his anger would have done wonders for the rest of us, not just himself.

That is a part of the self-mastery, the self-control.

I have to tell you, there are times for all of us when frustration and anger wells up inside us. Often this is accompanied by an emotional outburst. In such times, it will be important to try to control our outburst and when we can't it can be equally as important to apologize. Let me cite for you an example of my own misguided handling of anger.

Years ago back when my kids were young, I remember getting juice out of the back of the refrigerator, when I knocked over a whole pitcher of another drink. I yelled at the refrigerator as if it was its fault for being so full. What I yelled was: "We should not fill this shelf so full!"

Obviously this somewhat hurtful comment directed at the fridge and said in frustration and ending up being directed at my family was not meant to be hurtful. But... the real kicker is, it was my fault for trying to go too fast and not moving the pitcher that spilled to the counter while I got the juice.

In regard to anger, it is important to try to control our outburst and when we can't it can be equally as important to apologize. Self-control and self-mastery are areas where all of us need to improve. Self-control is a fruit of the spirit because when it exists in the life of the Christian, so many other persons are positively affected.

Self-control is a fruit of the spirit that benefits ourselves yes, but truly it helps others as well. It takes a lot to honestly look at ourselves and recognize the areas where we can improve and live our lives with self-control. But it is wonderful that God has made a way for us to do this by the power of a relationship with His Son Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to see us through.