



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network Spiritual Guidelines The Fruit of the Spirit (x)

'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.' (Galatians 5:22-23)

'Live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age'

(Titus 2.12)

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It is not surprising that self-control is included in the fruit of the Spirit. In fact it is the ultimate characteristic to be named in the list Paul gave to the Galatians (5.22-23). Paul also recognises that all these characteristics only come through constant practice of the spiritual gifts. He maintains that anyone responding to the call of Christ on their lives should *"make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love"* - the emphasis on knowledge indicates the importance of using self-control as we acquire more information and linking it with perseverance indicates that it may not come easily - that we are all on a journey.

He gives us good reasons in his continuing words *"if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*.

Definition

So what is self-control? The simple dictionary definition is 'the ability to control oneself, in particular one's emotions and desires, especially in difficult situations.' In other words it is to take responsibility for one's own life and actions. The Greek word for self-control is *"egkrateia"* which means 'temperance: the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.'

Biblical Quotes

Great Proverbs on Self-Control

The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel were given

1. for gaining wisdom and instruction;
2. for understanding words of insight;
3. for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour, doing what is right and just and fair;
4. for giving prudence to those who are simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young
5. let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance
6. for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

Here is a selection of some of those not used in this article:

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding' (3:5)

'Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin' (13:3)

'The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction' (16:23).

'Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city' (16:32).

'The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives' (18:7).

'Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity' (21:23)

'Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags' (23:20-21).

'Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control' (25:28).

'Fools give full vent to their rage but the wise bring calm in the end (29:11).

In secular terms it allows you to stop yourself from doing things you want to do but that might not be in your best interest.

In biblical terms we keep ourselves from doing those things which we should not do, while at the same time doing the things that we should do. We take our example from Jesus' life as he is the one person who had perfect self-control throughout all the temptations of his life - he *'had no sin'* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He spent much quality time with God being refreshed and at one with God and the Holy Spirit and he chose to obey God's will.

So it can be with us - we too can draw on God's strength when we exercise self-control and the more time we spend with him, the more good fruit God will grow in our lives. Allowing God to be in control of our lives should be the aim of every Christian.

Evidence of Faith

In fact 'letting God help us' in developing self-control is seen as an evidence of faith. James reminds us that *'human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires'* (James 1.20) which is preceded by the recommendation that *'everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry'* and the whole chapter gives us wise advice on how to be God's people.

Characteristics of Christians Exercising Self-control

1. They let God take control 2 Timothy 1.7
2. They think before they speak Proverbs 13.3
3. They do not react immediately Proverbs 19.11
4. They live wisely Ephesians 5.15-16
5. They manage their resources well Proverbs 21.20
6. They live healthily 1 Thessalonians 4.4
7. They are in control of their emotions: they do the right thing even when they don't feel like it

Self-Control is NOT Self-Confidence

Confidence in self gives a false measurement which can be harmful. We have to avoid any false confidence in self. We do well to note *'When such a person hears the words of this oath and they invoke a blessing on themselves, thinking, 'I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way,' they will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry'* (Deuteronomy 29:19). The proverbs give us wise advice *'trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'* (3:5); *'Do not wear yourself out to get rich do not trust your own cleverness'* (23:4); *'Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them'* (26:12) and *'Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe'* (28:26).

Managing Self-Control

There are many examples in the Bible of wrong actions being taken when people do not exercise Self-control or lose control of themselves. These are just a few and you can identify more yourself.

1. Esau sells his birthright for a mess of pottage because he could not control his hunger - Genesis 25
2. Cain kills Abel because he could not control his envy and jealousy - Genesis 4
3. Moses kills the Egyptian because he could not control his temper and tried to take justice himself - Exodus 2
4. David murders Bathsheba's husband because he wants her for himself - 2 Samuel 11 and 14
5. Peter chops off the soldier's ear impulsively because of anger in the Garden of Gethsemane Luke 22
6. Ananias and Sapphira lose their lives for bearing false witness because of their greed - Acts 5

On the other hand there are also many more examples of times when self-control stopped someone making a wrong action - like when David did not take Saul's life when he had the opportunity - 1 Samuel 24 and 25. List some others.

Some Practices to Avoid

Self-control is to be recommended but whereas we are called to carry out Self-examination to see if our faith stands up (2 Corinthians 13:5) and before partaking of communion (1 Corinthians 11:28) we must beware of Self-delusion and Self-deception and even any Self-condemnation which does not lead to a change of behaviour. There is no place for Self-righteousness, Self-exaltation or Self-indulgence. Nor can we use Cain's Self-justifying argument when God asked him where Abel was (Genesis 4:9), or torture to exact Self-incriminating testimony (Acts 22:24).

There may be a case for Self-denial (Philippians 3:7,8) but not for Self-flagellation which is associated with idolatrous worship (1 Kings 18:28).

Self-control is worth striving for - even if it appears we are in a battle situation - *'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me'* (Luke 9.23).

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