**PRINCIPLES FOR SELF-CONTROL**

Sunday School Lesson 14

*Bible Principles for Daily Living*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

9/18/2022

**Introduction:** Exhibiting self-control (being temperate) can be a very difficult task; yet it is something that we are commanded to do in the Word of God. It is our responsibility to keep our flesh in check with the help of the Holy Spirit of God. If we do not have control over the flesh, how will we be able to resist the inevitable temptations that come along? The Bible tells us that we are supposed to die to ourselves. We are to slay the flesh daily so that we can live properly for the Lord. It is our responsibility to rein in our minds and to put on the mind of Christ. It is our responsibility to direct our hearts into proper, Godly desires. Too often, Christians seem to have so little self-control in our lives. We let the eyes see what they want. We let the mouth say what it wants. We let the feet go where they want. We let the mind think what it wants. We let our feelings have power over our actions. We give in to so many appetites and desires of the flesh. Needless to say, it is imperative that we have some principles in place to help us in exhibiting the self-control that we need. Let’s consider the following principles to help us in this area:

1. **WE MUST HAVE SELF-CONTROL TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE FIT TO RUN THE RACE.**

* This principle comes from our introductory reading in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. We see that the need for self-control is tied together with our ability to properly run the race and obtain the crown that is set before us. This fundamental rule ought to govern our mindset in this matter of self-control. The illustration is of an athlete who has to practice self-control in order to be the best at what he does. There are some athletes who have great talent, but they have very little self-control. These athletes typically do not succeed. Likewise, we can have all the God-given talents in the world, but if we do not practice self-control in our Christian walk, we are going to fall short of what we could do for the cause of Christ. This ties back to our earlier lesson on principles for convictions. Something may not be bad in and of itself, but it may be something that is going to be a stumblingblock for us in our Christian race. (Hebrews 12:1)

1. **WE CAN AND SHOULD HAVE SELF-CONTROL OVER OUR FEELINGS.**

* “I just can’t control the way that I feel.” Like me, you’ve probably heard that statement said many times before. Is it a true statement? Do we really have no control over the way that we feel? I’ve heard some well-meaning people say that you can’t control what you feel, but you can control what you do. I would present to you that what you do will help you to have power over how you feel. If I’m feeling grumpy, might it be that I did not get the rest that I should have gotten? If I’m feeling afraid, might it be that I have not put my faith in the Lord like I ought to? If I’m feeling confused, might it be that I haven’t spent much time in prayer or Bible reading to know what I ought to do? Fear, love, anger, happiness/joy, bitterness, and sadness are just some of the primary emotions that we can experience. The Bible has Scripture to address each one of these. We must have rule over our spirit (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28). Obviously, there are situations that happen to us that can provoke an emotional response. In those situations, it is our responsibility to control how we respond. (Ephesians 4:26-31; Hebrews 12:15)

1. **WE MUST REALIZE THAT THE FLESH HAS ITS OWN DESIRES THAT MUST BE RESISTED.**

* It is important for us to understand that our sinful flesh does have desires that have to be resisted. Temptations come as a result of our lusts (James 1:14-15). This word *lust* simply means the eager desire of the flesh. We are tempted by the things that our flesh wants. For a basic example, we understand that our flesh desires food. This is a natural desire of the flesh. Yet, we cannot and should not get everything that our flesh wants (Prov. 23:21; Gen. 3:6; 1 Thess. 4:3-4). Every one of us has a flesh that lusts after certain things. The Bible makes it clear that these are our own lusts (Psalm 81:12; 2 Timothy 4:3; 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 16-18; 1 John 2:16-17). It is our job to intentionally deny the lusts of the flesh (Titus 2:12). We cannot serve these lusts (Titus 3:3). We must flee from them (2 Timothy 2:22). We must crucify them (Galatians 5:24). We are able to resist these lusts when we walk in the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16-17).

1. **WE MUST ALLOW THE SPIRIT TO TRAIN US TO HAVE GODLY DESIRES.**

* We are not to be fashioned according to our former lusts (1 Peter 1:14). With the help of the Holy Spirit of God, we are to train our desires to be wholesome, Godly desires. This is done by resisting those lusts previously mentioned and obeying the Spirit. If we don’t resist the lusts, I believe the Bible shows us that those lusts will continue to get worse and worse (Romans 1:24-27). We must make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14). When a person first comes to church, how strong was their desire to be there? Maybe they just came because of an invitation. Maybe they came because they knew they were supposed to, but they really didn’t desire. There was just a little conviction there. As we feed our spirit by the Spirit of God, our appetite and desire for Godly things continues to grow. King David developed a desire for the Word of God. He learned to crave It as a honeycomb. As we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires continue to change; subsequently, the Lord gives us the desires of the heart (Psalm 37:4). We must let Him and His Spirit guide our desires instead of our sinful flesh. Notice all of the references to Godly desires (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:1; Phil. 4:17; 1 Cor. 14:1; Ps. 19:10; Prov. 10:24).

1. **SELF-CONTROL OF OUR SPEECH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL.**

* James 1:26 shows us how important the self-control of our speech is. If we do not bridle our tongue, our religion is in vain. The main instruction that the Lord left with His disciples was to go out and preach the Gospel and teach all nations. This is done through words! Knowing this, we should understand just how important it is for us to have control over our words. We do not want to muddy the clear message of the Gospel. The tongue can cause tremendous outcomes – both good and bad. The book of James shows us that the tongue is a fire. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth (James 3:5-8)! I believe there is a real struggle for us in this area, especially in this day that we live in. We can all see the hyper-sensitive day that we are living in. People seem to be more offended than ever at words spoken. Our tendency is to go to the other extreme and have no control at all over our tongue. While this may feel good, that doesn’t make it right. Let us never forget how important it is for believers to have control over our words (1 Peter 3:10; Proverbs 29:11; 18:6-7; 13:3; Psalm 141:3-4).

1. **SELF-CONTROL DURING TRIALS KEEPS US FROM RESPONDING WITH EVIL ACTIONS.**

* One of the hardest times to have self-control is when things are not going very well. When we feel like we are being pressed or our backs are up against the wall, we have a tendency to lash out. If we are not careful, we can become very reactionary during times of difficulty and trials in our lives. When someone hurts us, our fleshly reaction is to consider how we may hurt them back. This is the definition of evil. It is to intentionally cause harm to another. The Lord commands us to resist our inclinations of the flesh and respond to others in love. Imagine the temptation that Christ had to respond when He was being mocked and crucified. Yet, He held His peace. He is our example to follow. We are commanded to turn the other cheek. We are commanded to pray for those who despitefully use us. We are commanded to love our enemies (Luke 6:27-31). This takes some real self-control. If it didn’t, then they probably wouldn’t be our enemies in the first place. Let us consider how important it is to have self-control in the times of difficulty and trials. Even worse than lashing out against someone, we might be tempted in the flesh to lash out at God as the children of Israel did so often in the wilderness.