



“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway,” I Corinthians 9:27.

Self Control

Lesson Aim: To emphasize the need of the Christian to seek Divine strength in bringing under control every impulse.

L514. Date: May 1964. **Text:** Romans 7:14-25; 12:1-2; I Corinthians 9:24-27. **Topic:** Discipline: Of Oneself.

INTRODUCTION — **“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls,”** Proverbs 25:28. On the other hand, **“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city,”** Proverbs 16:32. These passages underscore the importance of the subject for today's study: **“Self Control.”**

Self control is essential to and an evidence of true religion, James 1:26. It is a victory which can be worked out only by dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God and is an evidence of His indwelling, Galatians 5:22-23. No man is capable of subduing his natural self and guiding his own ways aright without divine aid. God's prophet, Jeremiah, has written, **“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps,”** Jeremiah 10:23. According to the Psalmist, the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord, Psalm 37:23. If a man's steps are not good it is an indication that he has not sought the Lord's help. The aim of this lesson is **“to emphasize the need of the Christian to seek Divine strength in bringing under control every impulse.”**

The discussion which follows will develop this aim by interpreting the Lesson Text under three ideas: the need of self control; the method of self control; the purpose of self control. Please study prayerfully for this lesson

to answer any need which may be in your own life.

EXPOSITION

I. CONFESSION OF NEED, Romans 7:14-25.

Every man which lives needs to seek God's help that he might master himself. Paul gives much thought to this matter in Romans 7. He makes three confessions, which every man could also make, which shows the need of self control as made possible by our Lord.

1. "I am carnal, sold under sin," verses 14-17. This must be confessed by every man who lives in a physical body. There are two words in the Greek language for "carnal." One implies that which is merely material, the other implying what is ethical. The former suggests man's nature as weak, the latter suggests his character as sinful. It is the former word used by Paul and means, "I am a mere man with weakened nature which is subject to temptations and even failures."

This fact is proved by his explanation which follows. There is an understanding of what is right and good. There is even a desire to perform what is known to be proper. However, there is a failure to consistently reach the desired goal. Paul seems to be saying, "Self is unable to hinder what it disapproves." He confesses to wrongdoing even though he hates the evil that he does. He concludes (verse 17) that evil deeds are the consequences of the influence of sin and the weak nature of man. This is no mere attempt at an excuse for his actions, but an explanation of his enslavement to sin. Sin becomes a tyrant which causes him to act against his better judgment.

"Total depravity" does not mean a person is as bad as he can be. It does not mean a baby is born already condemned because of personal guilt. It rather means the totality of man's nature is depraved, corrupted, perverted. This is exactly what Paul is here confessing. Even though a Spiritually enlightened mind may know what is right, depraved man cannot attain to right conduct without the aid of God.

2. "In my flesh dwells no good thing," verses 18-20. There is something more to a man than the flesh. So far as his person is concerned, however, no good thing dwells in the flesh. This does not mean that one's fleshly nature is evil in itself. It is spoken in terms of God's will. The person who tries to follow Jesus by the mere strength of the flesh will soon come to agree with Paul, "no good thing dwells in my flesh." I cannot find the strength there to fully do the will of God.

The failure of the flesh to do God's service is stressed in verses 18-19.

There is a great contrast between inclination and act. The will to do good was always present, but the execution of the good was unperformed. This does not mean the person described never did anything good, but—as we are all obliged to confess—that sin is mixed with all he does. Yet, this admission can be no encouragement to sin, nor any excuse for sin.

Paul is led to the same conclusion in verse 20 which he reached in verse 11. “I am not my own master. My true self wishes to be holy, but the tyrant within me constantly prohibits it.” Albert N. Arnold, writing in the “American Commentary,” has wisely commented, “Such a statement as this, separated from its connection, is easily perverted to an Antinomian and profane use. But to separate it from its connection is to pervert it. In its connection it is no immoral apology for sin, but a humiliating confession of sin. (Only he who has striven with all his powers, as if for and with his life, against sin {Hebrews 12:4}, and still finds its remainders within him, can truly say: It is no longer I that perform it.) Still, there is a better way!”

3. “I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me,” verses 21-25. Here is the ultimate statement of the moral contradiction within. The inward man delights in God's law. A law in his members wars against law of his mind. Godet has observed there are four laws mentioned in verses 22-23: “the law of God, which is the moral law whether written or unwritten; the law of sin, which reigns over man since the Fall; the law of the mind, which is the moral sense in man; and the law of the members, which leads to the individual falling under the law of sin.”

Verse 24 emits a wail of anguish and a cry for help. The Apostle uses the word “wretched” rather than “guilty” because the point of the conflict was not guilt and condemnation, but the indwelling power of evil which could not be overcome by man's unaided strength. The question, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” is indicative of deep desire, not a request for information. He desires deliverance from the principle of sin's dominion as it worked in his body. He knew where victory was—in Jesus Christ!

Victory over the flesh lies in Jesus Christ and the Christian's complete identification with Him. Since there never comes a time when the believer reaches absolute “sinless perfection,” it may be said of him that he “serves the law of sin” with the flesh. However, he serves God with the law of the mind. The more completely the law of God takes control, the less influence the law of sin exercises itself. **“His servants ye are to whom ye obey . . .”** Romans 6:16.

Here is the victory! **“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,” Galatians 2:20. Having died with Christ in salvation, the believer now lives the life of Christ in a physical body. The life of Christ delivers him from the bondage of the law of sin and death, Romans 8:2. In exact proportion as the life of Christ is lived in one's body, the law of sin is overthrown. Here is the victory and it is blessed indeed! **“Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace,”** Romans 6:11, 14. Victory over the workings of sin in the flesh is possible through Jesus Christ. Christian brother, claim that promise! Union with Christ by His Spirit will sanctify to a life of holy living. The following discussion stresses how one gains God's help for self control.

II. PRESENTATION OF SELF, Romans 12:1-2.

1. Presentation of self to God is based on His former mercies, verse 1a. Romans 1-11 expressed the “mercies” of God in His provision of redemption for a ruined race. As a consequence of these exhibitions of God's grace, let every believer come to present himself to God. Albert Arnold writes on this verse, “The tender—literally, wailing—compassions of God are here presented as a motive (**dia**) to thankful obedience and entire consecration. The same mercy of God which provides salvation to the sinner by grace is the ground of all Christian consecration and morality.” Salvation had already been received by those addressed in Romans 12:1. “The soul that is united to Christ by faith is ready to learn and to do its duty, for the simple but sufficient reason that it knows it can appropriate without reserve the marvelous resources of Divine grace.” — W. H. Griffith Thomas.

Self control and true Christian service is impossible without the help of God. God's help comes only as one submits to Christ as Saviour and Lord. Not upon God's “power” nor authority” nor “wrath,” but upon His unfathomable “grace” the believer is called to surrender all to Christ. Only herein can victory come.

2. The presentation of the inner self to God is expressed by the presentation of the body as well, verse 1b. There can be no such separation between spirit and flesh that one can be a truly dedicated Christian and let his body live on in sin. Never! “Your bodies” is rather a comprehensive phrase which means “yourselves”—spirit, soul, and body. The body is the instrument of the soul. It is through the body that the entire life reveals itself. Christian believers are usually inwardly united by faith to Christ and their

will is already God's. It only remains to present the body to Him for the purpose of carrying out that will.

Even the warfare going on between the redeemed and unredeemed natures of the believer is half won by the one resolve that sin will not be permitted to work in the body. This is what Paul had in mind in writing, **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace,”** Romans 6:12-14. Presentation of the body as a sacrifice to God will deliver it from obeying the impulses of sin.

3. Presentation of one's self to God is the fulfillment of a logical expectation, verse 1c. Such an offering is the logical outcome of one's former experiences with God in Christ. Godet says this is “the service which rationally corresponds to the moral premises contained in the faith which you profess.” Since it is true that the believer's physical body belongs to God—as a result of salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—it must be dedicated to Him, I Corinthians 3:16-17. Having been bought with a price, each believer no longer belongs to himself, but unto God who has redeemed him, I Corinthians 6:19-20. This is the logical thing to do. When this is done, however, the body is no longer an instrument to sin for the fleshly nature! Belonging to God, the body then receives His aid that the believer may exercise self control.

4. Presentation of one's self to God involves a positive and negative concept, verse 2. Negatively, the person dedicated to God will not be conformed to this world. This world is invariably evil and has Satan as its ruling power, Galatians 1:4; II Corinthians 4:4. Its basic characteristic is to follow the lusts of the flesh, Ephesians 2:1-3, the gratification of self rather than the doing of the will of God. The believer must not make the shape of his life after the fashion of the world.

Positively, one dedicates himself to God by the transformation of his mind that he may know, delight in, and do the perfect will of God. The renewing of the mind is a ministry of the Holy Spirit in which He works in the realm of intellect, moral knowledge, and thought. Therein He gives guidance concerning what is good and proper. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can renew the power of mental and moral perception. If one would control himself, let him seek the enlightenment and aid of the Spirit who can be the only real helper.

5. Presentation of one's self will result in the performance of God's will, verse 2. When one is fully dedicated to God, His will is **known** and understood. Sanday and Headlam write, "The result of this purification is to make the intellect, which is the seat of moral judgment, true and exact in judging on spiritual and moral questions." The will of God will be **done** by those dedicated to Him. This will be made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the will of God will be **enjoyed** by the person who is truly dedicated. If one would gain control and victory over sin's passions and lusts, let him dedicate himself to God. His body will come to a greater delight in God's will than in sin's rebellion.

III. EXPRESSION OF RESOLVE, I Corinthians 9:24-27.

1. Believers should resolve to win the waiting prize, verses 24-25. The city of Corinth was the site of the famous Isthmian games, in which the foot race was a leading attraction. Therefore, Paul uses this terminology to describe the believer's earnestness in his Christian life. Just as the runners compete that one of them may win the prize, so the Christian should run for the prize. In the Isthmian games, only one could win the prize, but in Christian service everyone may run so as to obtain. Exactly what the prize is for which the Christians run, Paul does not say. It is enough for him that "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" is there. No believer should content himself to be mediocre in God's service. Run as if only one could win the prize and you were determined to be that one!

2. Believers should resolve to discipline themselves so as to run effectively, verses 26-27a. On this passage the Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott commentary makes this observation: "Those who ran in their games (at Corinth) kept to a spare diet. They refrained from food they might eat, and from the liberties they used on other occasions. Should not Christians much more account themselves of their liberty, for so glorious an end as obtaining the prize set before them? They inured themselves to hardships. Those who fought in these exercises practiced by beating the air, but there is no such exercise in the Christian warfare. Their enemies are ever at hand: for this reason they must fight, not as those that beat the air, but must strive with all their might . . . Those who pursue the interests of their souls, must combat hard with fleshly lusts. The body must not be suffered to rule."

3. Believers should resolve so to live that they will be approved unto God, verse 27b. It is possible for one to run and still be disqualified because of wrong conduct in the game. It is possible for a Christian to serve and much of his life be "disapproved," considered unworthy. Since each one

must give an account of his own self to God, Romans 14:12, each one must carefully watch his entire life, every passion must be brought under control of divine grace. Each temper must be guarded over with zealous care. The will of God must be considered in all things. Then the faithful steward will hear God's, "Well done."

CONCLUSION — "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other . . ." Galatians 5:17. This could be agreed to by every Christian. The warfare is a constant reality. Man cannot overcome the promptings of sin alone. All he can do is to turn to God for help. God has given the assurance, **"Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,"** Galatians 5:16. Christian brother, do not live in torment and defeat any longer. There is victory over the flesh when the Spirit has control of your life. This is the secret of self control.

QUESTIONS

1. Why must we exercise self control?
2. Is Paul describing a saved or unsaved man in Romans 7?
3. What does it mean to be "carnal" in Romans 7:14?
4. Is it true that "no good thing" dwells in the flesh? Explain.
5. What laws does Paul mention in Romans 7:22-23?
6. How does Galatians 2:20 relate to self control?
7. How can one present his body to the Lord?
8. Why is such a sacrifice his "reasonable service"?
9. Why must the Christian discipline his body for service?
10. How does Galatians 5:16-17 relate to this study?