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SESSION 1 | Self-Control and the Mind

I. INTRODUCTION

II. A BIBLICAL TOUR OF SELF-CONTROL

Self-control was required of Adam and Eve.

- “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”” (Genesis 2:16–17).

The Israelites, Saul, David, and almost everyone else in the OT lacked self-control, with disastrous results.

- “Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.” (Exodus 32:25).
- “[Saul] waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.” (1 Samuel 13:8–9).
- “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.” (2 Samuel 11:1–2).

The book of Proverbs calls for self-control in every area of life.

- “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” (Proverbs 25:28).
- “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” (Proverbs 16:32).

- “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.” (Proverbs 29:11).

Daniel and his friends were extolled for their self-control.

- “But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.” (Daniel 1:8).

Jesus and the temptation

- “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:1–4).

Paul compares Christian self-control to the self-control of an elite athlete.

- “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:25–27).

Paul calls it a “fruit of the Spirit.”

- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22–23).

Paul describes self-control as essential for every kind of person.

- 1 But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. 9 Bondservants are to be

submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:1–14)

III. DEFINING SELF-CONTROL

What is self-control?

“What is self-control? It is a governance or prudent control of one’s desires, cravings, impulses, emotions, and passions. It is saying no when we should say no. It is moderation in legitimate desires and activities and absolute restraint in areas that are clearly sinful.” Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 110.

A definition: Self-control is governing your mind, will, and emotions in obedience to God’s word by the power of the Spirit.

- “As John Owen expressed it, ‘The good which the mind cannot discover, the will cannot choose, nor the affections cleave unto.’ Therefore, ‘in Scripture, deceit of the mind is commonly laid down as the principle of all sin’.” John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, 57.
- “As Christians, we must actively cultivate Christlike emotions in our lives. And to do that, we must look to Christ; we must focus on the image of God’s Son to whom we are being conformed.” Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Whitacre, *True Feelings*, 126.

Why self-control?

IV. SELF-CONTROL AND THE MIND

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4:23).

V. LEARNING SELF-CONTROL

VI. CONCLUSION