

Practicing Faithfulness and Self-Control

OT: Hab. 1:1-4;2:1-4

NT: Galatians 5:22

This is the final of the stewardship sermons based on the Galatians 5 passage. [Today](#) we look at the last two words in the list of the Spiritual gift- “Faithfulness and Self-Control. Stewardship is not a matter of how much we give, but how faithful we are. Our willingness to offer time, talent, *and* treasure to the ministry of God is our response to divine grace. It is not the payment for that grace, but the grateful response to it.

As with all the fruit of the Spirit, God Himself is the model we must study for examples of faithfulness to encourage us to trust and to emulate Him. The faithfulness of God is a familiar phrase to those of a religious mind, but its depth and scope are probably not as familiar. God's faithfulness seems to have been a favorite subject of Paul's. He writes of it in his first epistle (I Thessalonians) and again in what may have been his last (II Timothy).

Paul had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles; he found that, when all was said and done, God had never failed him.

Other New Testament writers are equally expressive on this subject. Peter writes, "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator". "Commit" is the word Greeks would use for making a deposit with a trusted friend as we would to a bank. Christ committed His life to God all the way to death, and we are to follow His steps. Paul responds with a similar statement.

For this reason, I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Paul adds, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; God cannot deny Himself."

When we speak of one another as faithful, we mean that we adhere to our word, that we keep faith with all and that we discharge our obligations. Because of these things, we are trustworthy. It is much the same when we think and speak of God's faithfulness.

Usually, the first idea that comes to mind when God is called faithful is that He keeps His promises. This, of course, is included in the concept of God's faithfulness, but it is interesting that it appears only twice in the New Testament. Paul exhorts, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."

Paul's thought goes far beyond even this. We can trust Him all the way to death because "He cannot deny Himself."

God's very nature and character constitute a solemn obligation that He is His own law, that He is bound by what He is and that He can never be even in the smallest degree contradictory to or less than the level of His own consistent and uniform self.

The last characteristic listed as a fruit of the Spirit is self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is the change in our character that comes about because of the Holy Spirit's work in us. We do not become a Christian on our own, and we cannot grow on our own. It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Every good thing we do is the fruit of the Spirit's working in our lives.

Self-control is, of course, the ability to control oneself. It involves moderation, constraint, and the ability to say “no” to our baser desires.

One of the proofs of God’s working in our lives is the ability to control our own thoughts, words, and actions. It’s not that we are naturally weak-willed. But our fallen nature is under the influence of sin. The Bible calls it being a "slave to sin". One definition of sin is "filling a legitimate need through illegitimate means." Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are incapable of knowing and choosing how best to meet our needs. Even if we knew what would be best, such as not smoking, another flaw, like greed, would take precedence and enslave us again. When we are saved by Christ's sacrifice, we are free. That liberty includes, among other things, freedom from sin.

“Our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”. Now, as the Spirit gives us self-control, we can refuse sin.

Believers need self-control because the outside world and internal forces still attack. Like a vulnerable city, we must have defenses. A wall around an ancient city was designed to keep out the enemy.

Judges at the gates determined who should be allowed in and who should remain outside. Soldiers and gates enforced those decisions. In our lives, these defenses might include avoiding questionable circumstances, meeting with other believers, and meditating on the life-giving Word of God. We don't exhibit self-control if we continually play with that which would enslave us.

So, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law". Be good stewards of all God has given you. Use these fruits wisely to accomplish God's will and to live as God intends us to live.

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