

## Self Control Is Formed By Faith In God's Work

In preparing for this week's message on self-control, I came across this description from **Proverbs 25:28**,

[28] A man without self-control  
is like a city broken into and left without walls. (ESV)

What a vivid description! Solomon is basically saying that a person without self-control is defenseless. Their emotions are too easily manipulated and exploited and this makes us weak. We live in a world that tells us to trust our guts, but Solomon would say that is foolish.

For example...our anger. When we are angry; when we feel our internal temperature rise and our adrenaline pumping and this urge starts to well up within us to do something...that's a great indicator that we believe we are witnessing, or a victim to, injustice. Anger is a reaction to a perceived wrong that wants to make it right. But should we trust that anger?

For instance, when a two-year-old asks you for another cookie and you know they've had three already (which is really more than you planned on giving them in the first place, but...you know) and you say, "no" and then they flop on the floor screaming and shouting at you; is that anger justified? No! They are being run by their emotions. The role of the parent with that child is to teach him self-control. And here's why: one day, he will be a 30-year old. And he may hear the word "no" and he may get angry and throw a tantrum...and when 30-year-old men throw tantrums, people get hurt. Not to mention, the ruin they cause themselves.

Somewhere along the way, we must learn self-control.

Now, as Matt preached on last week: a lot of work is done through parents or people who play that parental role. I really benefited from Godly men outside my family who stepped in and pushed me on all of these issues. But what about as we grow older? None of us are masters of self-control, are we? How do we go about cultivating it now?

As we walk through this topic this morning, we're going to take a different approach than we have in the last few weeks. Instead of rooting ourselves in one passage, we are going to do a survey of Proverbs. And by doing this, we're going to see how to not only recognize when we aren't in control but how to begin the process of forming self-control within us. We are going to see: **Self Control Is Formed By Faith In God's Work**

### **1. Self-Control Is...Formed In The Wise (14:29-30; 29:11)**

#### **Proverbs 14:29-30**

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,  
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.  
A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh,  
but envy makes the bones rot.

#### **Proverbs 29:11**

[11] A fool gives full vent to his spirit,  
but a wise man quietly holds it back.

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Self-control is described here as slow to anger, ie. patience. And as a tranquil heart, a peaceful inner life. Both of these are ways God describes Himself. First in **Ex 34:6** and then when Jesus describes Himself in **Matthew 11**. Someone who is self-controlled, then, exhibits the character of God.

Furthermore, someone with self-control is described as someone who has restraint. Who can control his tongue from ranting and raving. Don't we like people like that? What would happen if all your neighbors and co-workers and family members were patient, peaceful presences who thought before they spoke? Wouldn't our lives be so much better?! Who wouldn't want that for ourselves? So, how do we go about getting it?

Well, it's described as a product of wisdom. Wisdom is the tree and self-control is the fruit. So, how do we get wisdom? Remember the motto of Proverbs here, **Proverbs 1:7**;

[7] *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (ESV)*

Fear of the Lord = worship of God and submission to His will. In other words, we treat God as God. He really is in control, the ultimate judge, and the One who loves us. To Fear Him is to place your life under His control.

So, the lack of self-control then is the fruit of foolishness. And foolishness is planted in the soil of a person who does not fear the Lord. They put their lives under someone or something else's control. ***And the greatest threat to God's rule over you is...you.***

In **Genesis 3**, the temptation to rebel against God's first command is that you can be equal to God. In other words, you can be your own God. And that temptation is still there deep in all of our hearts. You can almost say that the opposite of self-control = self-serving.

And if we think about it, we'll see just how true that is. ***When you lose control of your emotions, what is usually going on? Is it that you are upset that someone sinned against God OR that someone sinned against you? Is it that someone didn't live up to God's standards OR that they didn't meet your expectations? Is it that something is wrong in the world and not as it should be OR that something is not as you think it should be?***

For instance, yesterday during pickleball, after I hit the ball into the net for what seemed like the 200th time in a row, I threw my racket. Now, I meant to throw it into the net but because I have horrible aim the racket goes over the net and almost hits someone in the leg. Now, I'm not trying to hurt anyone, but because gravity and the ball didn't do what I wanted it to I lost control of my composure.

What about you? Do you find yourself in those moments too? The reason we all have those moments is because deep down we want to be in control of everything. And the lack of self-control comes when we realize that we don't really have control. When our work and our efforts aren't going to be enough to change the outcome of our lives, we lose our self-control and our emotions get the better of us. This is why the Proverbs show us that **Self Control Is Formed By Faith In God's Work**

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If we are going to gain self-control, then we have to replace our self-serving heart with a God fearing heart; we have to replace our own work to control the world with the work that God has already done for us. This is why our second point this morning is:

### **2. Self Control Is...Formed by Faith (14:26-27; 19:23)**

#### **Proverbs 14:26–27**

[26] In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,  
and his children will have a refuge.

[27] The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
that one may turn away from the snares of death. (ESV)

#### **Proverbs 19:23**

[23] The fear of the LORD leads to life,  
and whoever has it rests satisfied;  
he will not be visited by harm. (ESV)

These two sets of Proverbs point us back to the source of true stability and peace which are the foundation of self-control. And they are found in the same place we find wisdom...the Fear of the Lord.

Worshiping God and trusting His ways produces hope and strength in us so we can say no to temptations to sin, those outbursts and impulses that end up hurting others and which we end up regretting later. Submitting to God as our God creates a peace in our souls that makes us content with our lives. It calms us down. It produces self-control.

And here we see something almost ironic, don't we? Self-control is formed not by turning our eyes inward and trying to get ourselves together. It's formed by turning our eyes off of ourselves and onto God. What does that look like though? Well, think of it in these three ways:

- **Weekly:** It's committing to gathering with God's people, like on Sundays or at Gospel Communities. But it's more than that, it's choosing to have friend time with other Christians. Setting up time with one another just to talk and hang out. Setting your week up to be around others who will support you.
- **Daily:** The rhythms of reading a part of the Bible and trying to apply it. Talking to God about your day, asking for help from Him.
- **Moment-by-moment:** It's not just about that one time a day, but it's in those moments when you lose control and you need mercy, it's in the moments when can predict the temptation is going to be strong and you know you are going to need Him. So, you - in the moment - talk to Him and ask for strength. This moment-by-moment life is what the apostle Paul calls "walking by the Spirit" in **Galatians 5**. We are being led by the Spirit of God, depending on Him.

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Now, as you hear me give you this list of things, maybe the thought you have is: Ok, I get this...but walking this out takes self-control. And the issue I have is that I lack self-control. So, how am I going to do this? Well, picture it like this.

You want to grow in your self-control and you are standing at a fork in the road and the path on your left has a sign that says "Work Hard For God" and the other has a sign that says "Trusting God's Work For You".

You think to yourself, "I want to work hard for God. I'm tired of letting Him down. I'm tired of making a fool of myself." And you take the road to the left and you come to this town where everybody seems really nice and warm and kind. Everybody's smiling real big.

And the mayor greets you and says, "Welcome! We're so glad you want to work hard for God. Here's a list of things we do in this town." And he hands you a sheet with words like "Quiet Time and Church Attendance" on it. And then there's this long list of things under a category that is just labeled "Don't" with things like "cuss, watch rated-R movies, drink, smoke..."

And you are thinking, "This is it! This is what I needed. Some structure in my life!" And so you move in and you get to working hard for God. And it starts out great. You feel accomplished. Like you're growing. Like you matter to God because of all you are doing. But then you get sick and you miss your quiet time a few mornings and you fall behind on your Bible reading plan.

And you become depressed and you struggle to pray; the energy is lacking.

And then someone cuts you off in traffic and you feel the anger rising up within you and push it down...after all you are working on self-control.

And then your neighbor uses your wi-fi without asking you and the lady across the street is wearing tight pants and you can't stop yourself from thinking impure thoughts. And you are really wanting a beer but you know that's frowned upon around here. You are working really hard on controlling it all.

And then one day, someone steals your favorite pen and you explode! You yell and throw a fit and you throw things and call people names and when it's all done...you hang your head in shame and you walk out. You can't believe it. You start to feel as if you'll never change.

And so, you walk back down the road you came in on and you make it back to the fork in the road and you see the sign for the other road again, "Trusting God's Work For You." And you decide to try it. And you hobble into this town. And the first thing you notice is that you aren't the only one hobbling. Everybody in this town has got a limp too.

And the mayor greets you and says, "Welcome! We are so glad you are here!"

And you say, "Listen, I'm only here because there's no other place to go. So, just give me the paper with the list of things to do and I'll try my best, ok?"

And the mayor looks at you, confused. "Things to do. What do you mean?"

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“Well, I want to become more self-controlled. Aren't there things to do?”

The mayor looks at you. “Oh...didn't you read the sign when you came into town? Trust God's work for you.”

“That's it? How's that gonna help me keep my cool? How's that gonna help me fight my urges? You don't got anything more?”

The mayor looks at you with understanding and with compassion, “Oh, that's not all we do, but that's the only thing we *need* to do.”

Confused, you look at him, “I don't understand.”

“Well, in this town, we belong to Jesus.”

“Ok, and...”

“We aren't punished for our sins because Jesus was crucified for them and took their punishment for us. And more than that, we are new people because Jesus was raised from the dead and gives us the same Spirit that raised Him. In our new life we are free from sin's power and simply live by trusting what He's already done for us.”

You think this over. “Ok. But what about when I sin and I lose control and I fall back into temptation again and again. What do I do when I'm not loving God like I should?”

“Oh child, ‘[In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins.](#)’ (1 John 4:10). All of that is forgiven, so just trust in what God's done for you by confessing your sin, receiving His mercy, and trying again.”

“Everytime?”

“Everytime.”

“Ok...but doesn't Jesus want me to change? Doesn't He want me to grow?”

“Oh, yes. That's why God's Spirit now lives in you. And the ‘[fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...](#)’ God Himself will grow it in you as you trust what He's already done for you because...‘[those who belong to Jesus have crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires](#)’(Galatians 5:22-24). You trust in the work God's done for you and self-control will come. **Self Control Is Formed By Faith In God's Work.**”

Now...think back through those three areas where we turn our eyes onto God.

- **Weekly**
- **Daily**
- **Moment-by-moment**

When you trust what God has done for you in Christ Jesus, that kind of life will become more and more attractive to you. You will start to love God more than you love yourself and you will want to serve Him more than you want to serve yourself. The Spirit inside of you that has made you into a new person, will actively alter your desires so that you WANT to spend time with God and His family. Now, sometimes that urge will be stronger than others but...it will be there.

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And so, this becomes not just about aiming to get self-control; but about embracing the life God's Spirit has given, which self-control is a part of. Our lack of self-control is a lack of faith. A lack of trust. So, how do you need to respond?

- Repent of your lack of self-control, not by trying harder to be better, but by resting in God's love and control.
  - We're looking for progress not perfection. You find yourself calming down quicker, going to the Lord quicker. The process speeds up for you each time. That's sanctification.
- Helping one another by lowering the temperature for each other. A community that rests in God's work becomes a community that fosters peace and joy and self-control in one another.
- One of the easiest ways to stand out today is to be kind and self-controlled. To not rant and rave and to earnestly own up and repent when we do. If we can trust in God's work for us and grow in His character, we'll have multiple opportunities to share the Gospel...

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