

READ II Timothy 3:1-5

Maybe you remember one of those Facebook fads that was going around some months ago where parents would set their son or daughter at the table or at a countertop with a cookie or two right in front of their faces. The mom or dad would then tell the child to wait until they got back before they could eat the cookie that was in front of them. This was basically just a cute little test to see just how much self-control a child could exhibit when a cookie was right there in front of them for the taking. Most of the kids I saw were willing to be patient until mom or dad got back, and they were usually showered with praise for doing so good with this little experiment. Katie and I joked that our girls would fail miserably seeing as how we often have to get onto one or both of them for sneaking a bite or drink while we're trying to pray before our meals! If they can't wait till we get done praying while we're in the room then we have little faith in this other test. The self-control just isn't quite there for them yet when it comes to yummy food!

Some might remember a famous study that took place in the 60s that was a much more thorough study along these lines. Stanford professors took around 90 children and put a marshmallow before them. The children were told that if they would not eat the marshmallow until the adult returned from the room then they would receive another marshmallow they could eat in addition to the original one. They then took these results and traced the progress of these children over the next 30 years. Those who showed restraint with the marshmallows tended to be more successful as adults while the opposite was generally true for those who just couldn't resist a free marshmallow in front of their faces.

This experiment was focused on seeing if the willingness to put off instant gratification for better long term gain at a younger age was indicative of a person's future behavior and decision making. While there seemed to be some correlation, the reality is that self-control is something that can and must be learned as we all grow and mature as individuals and as people of faith in God, especially in a world that seems to be so unrestrained in regards to the appetites and desires of others. We just read of Paul's warning to Timothy that there were days coming when people would grow worse and worse in their lack of self-control along with other sins. **(II Timothy 3)**

We live in a time where people are growing more and more emboldened to be willing to do whatever it is they want to do simply because they want to do it. This is manifested in slogans such as *"love is love"*, *"my body, my rules"*, and even *"no justice, no peace."* The first slogan is used by those who desire to be romantically involved with whoever it is they desired to be with regardless of age, status, or gender. The second slogan is used by those who are proponents of a woman's freedom to kill the child that is developing within her body. The third has by used by some to signal that recent perpetrated acts of injustice are worthy reasons to go about looting, stealing, damaging property, and even harming others.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes so aptly states in **Ecclesiastes 1:9** there is nothing new under the sun. People were living unrestrained lives in the times of Paul and Timothy and they continue to do so today. But what are we to do as the people of God as we are surrounded by such behavior? I will make the argument this morning that our responsibility is to go against the grain of this unrestrained world by living with self-control in all things. We're going to consider the text of **I Thessalonians 5:1-11** to see why this is the better way of living, and it is my hope that we will be impressed with the need to always see self-control (*the ability to control oneself, particular ones emotions and desires or the expression of them in one's behavior, especially in difficult situations*) as our goal in every situation in which we might find ourselves.

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

A. As believers in God, we are confident in the coming judgement day and are preparing for it. (vv.1,2)

1. There seemed to be some sort of confusion on the part of the Thessalonians concerning the judgment day/day of the Lord. This can be seen going back in the text to **4:13-18**. There seemed to be a concern that those who had already passed away might be at some disadvantage concerning the Lord's return, and it might have been that they themselves were not feeling adequately prepared for His return. Paul seeks to give them encouragement by reassuring them that, yes, there would be a return and that they were already convinced that such would be the case.
2. We can even see from Paul's writings that he had confidence in the faith and living of the Thessalonians. In **4:1**, Paul seeks to give encouragement to these brothers and sister to live and please God according to the instruction they had received from him...just as they were already doing! He desired for them to do it even more. He adds on further encouragement in our text of this morning by stating that they really were not in any need of him writing anything on this issue to them because *"you yourself known very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."* Paul was confident in their knowledge and how they were responding to it. This ought to be the status quo for those who believe in God and follow His Son Jesus. We ought to have the utmost confidence in the coming resurrection and judgment day, and that ought to dictate the way that we live.

B. Those who belong to darkness are not expecting a judgment and are not preparing for it. (vv.3-7)

1. But this isn't the case for those of the world who live in darkness. Of these people Paul states that they will be living life as they desire like usual while thinking that everything is perfect peaceful and safe to so, but suddenly the destruction of judgment would be upon them and they would not be able to escape it. Time and time again Paul refers to these types of people as being people who live in darkness and certainly this is language that Paul uses to differentiate them from those who live in the Light that is Jesus Christ and our God.
2. It is these types of people who live unrestrained lives. Paul says that they belong to the night and darkness for it is in these things that they either sleep or get drunk. The two sides of lacking self-control seem to be at play here. We often associate a lack of self-control in doing things that we ought not do, and that would be the case here in regards to getting drunk at night. But there is another aspect in which a lack of self-control keeps us from doing what we ought to be doing. Those who live in the darkness are said to sleep at night, and we could take this to mean that they are failing to use themselves in appropriate ways.
3. Therefore they are failing on all sides. They are doing what they ought not do (drunkenness) and they are failing to be busy (sleeping) doing those things that would be appropriate and good. They have no concern for a coming judgment, so the only thing dictating their actions is whatever it is they feel like doing or not doing. There is a clear contrast being set up here by the Apostle for the Thessalonians to see what the world is doing and what they are expected to be doing/not doing as the children of light. They are to be different and set apart from those who belong to the night and darkness.

C. We are to stand out from the darkness as children of the day who live self-controlled lives as we look forward to our salvation through Jesus Christ. (vv.8-11)

1. Based upon what he has just written, the Apostle Paul now seeks to hammer home exactly what it is that separates the children of light from the children of darkness. It all begins with belief in God and an understanding and acknowledgment of the coming resurrection. Those who do not believe in the coming resurrection and judgment are going to live just as they desire to live, but

those who believe that such awaits in the future will be shaped and molded by such a believe. They will live with self-control in desiring to be prepared and ready for such a day.

2. Now, this isn't something that necessarily comes easy for all people. Sure there might be some people who always seem to be level-headed and cool as a cucumber in every situation, but I would dare say that even a majority of those people have had to put in great effort to arrive at that place in life. Self-control is not something that you are only born with or you're not, but it is something we must choose to exhibit. Additionally, it can and must be learned by each of us who profess Christ believe themselves to be led by Him because it will be the determining factor as to whether or not we will be ready and prepared for that resurrection and judgment day that we are confident is coming in the future.
3. Consider two well known passages that include an emphasis on our need for self-control. One of the first that might come to mind is that of **II Peter 1:3-11** where Peter describes the building blocks of strong faith that will lead us to being fruitful for God and help us gain entry into the eternal kingdom of Jesus. That very things that we've seen in **I Thessalonians** concerning the resurrection, judgment, and eternity are seen as being in play and connected with self-control by Peter, as well.
4. Additionally, we can't talk about the need for self-control without reading through what Paul writes to the Galatians in **Galatians 5:16-26** with the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Let's first notice that self-control is a fruit that will be seen within us if we are being led by God's spirit, and the lack of God's spirit within us will be seen if we fail to practice self-control by participating in the works of the flesh. Each of the works of the flesh that are listed could be directly tied in to a lack of self-control being exhibited by perpetrator. Someone who is exhibiting godly self-control cannot be someone who engaged in sexual immorality, hatreds, outbursts of anger, and other such wicked actions. These are the fruit that are born by those who are living in an unrestrained manner.
5. Each of these passages and their messages only further give evidence to the great need for those who live in the light to do so by living self-controlled lives, and we can see back in our text just as we have seen in these other texts that such things are directly tied into our faith and the salvation that is given by and through Jesus. (**I Thessalonians 5:8**) Peter states that our practicing such things will show that we are useful and actually be used by Jesus, and Paul says that such will show that we belong to Jesus. This only further emphasizes what Paul has said earlier about having been crucified with Christ and now being led by Him in all things (**Galatians 2:20**)...including practicing self-control.

It is through these admonitions to live self-controlled lives guided by faith and the hope of salvation that these brethren could be encouraged to endure unto the end. However, what if they saw themselves as lack in self-control? What if we find ourselves lacking in it in different areas of our lives? The reality is I can only get so specific this morning because I don't know the areas in which you're lacking in self-control. I'm not certain what things you are failing to do or what things you're doing that you ought not be doing, but I can share three quick tips that can help us to hopefully take these areas more seriously.

How Do We Grow In Self-Control?

A. Recognize its importance and value in our lives.

1. When Paul was conversing with Felix in **Acts 24:24,25**, he seems to have been focusing these discussions on the important matters of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. How do we know these were important topics that truly mattered? Luke records that *"Felix became afraid and replied, 'Leave now, but when I have an opportunity I'll call for*

you.” Why would Felix become afraid? I can only suppose that he recognized the serious nature of the need for righteousness, the important part that self-control played in it, and the reality of a coming judgment that would bring it all into account. We don’t know if Felix ever made that call, but we must recognize the importance and value of self-control within our own lives if we want to be prepared for that judgment.

2. Any growth in self-control has to start here. There has to be that recognition in the value of sacrificing short term pleasure for long term joy. Remember those kids who sacrificed the tasty treat of one marshmallow in order to have two in just a short time. That is what we’re trying to do on a much grander scale. Our adversary is seeking to cause us to lay aside self-control in order to experience temporary and immediate gratification. We must be people who recognize the importance and value in standing firm in the Lord through self-control in order to be prepared for that final day. If we can keep what is most valuable at the forefront of our minds then we will have the best chance of making the right and proper decisions in those difficult moments.

B. Focus on keeping our emotions in check.

1. It does seem to be those difficult moments when we tend to find ourselves most often failing in self-control. Let’s go back to **Galatians 5** and the works of the flesh and notice how many of these wicked actions can be tied into moments when in a moment’s notice our emotions get worked up and we have the propensity to act out in an unbecoming way. How often do we hear from people about them getting caught up in the heat of the moment and getting caught up in sexual immorality before they even know it. The same could be true for hatreds, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, and others. Yes, God made us to be emotional creatures, but we must learn to keep our emotions in check.
2. This means we need to know something about ourselves and what things cause us to feel certain ways that can get us into trouble. If I know that being in a situation with someone other than my spouse can lead to moments of intense emotions that can lead to immorality...I need to avoid those situations. If I know that scrolling through Facebook and seeing the success of others produced jealousy within me...I need to log off. If I know that watching this particular TV channel is only going to cause me get upset and yell in anger...I need to turn it off. We need to know ourselves and our emotions and do whatever it is that we can in order to maintain self-control.

C. Don’t set ourselves up for easy failure.

1. Closely tied in with this is the need to not put ourselves in situations where failure is imminent. I just mentioned it, but Paul states in **1 Corinthians 7** that self-control is a must for all people, but if we are not able to keep our sexual appetite in check then marriage is the appropriate thing to do if we are in a position to do such. Paul was seemingly a man who was in complete control in this area to the point that he could remain single, but he realized not all people were as he was. This means those unlike him must be careful the situations they put themselves in. This could be true for any behavior we ought not engage in.
2. On the other hand, if there are things that we know we need to be doing then we need to make sure we need to remove inhibitors or set up aids. If we realize our need for more consistent daily Bible reading, are we helping ourselves out by picking and sticking to a plan? Are we putting our Bibles in the best accessible place so that we are ready to get to it at a moment’s notice? If we need to be more consistent in prayer, are we setting aside times in the day to do such or are we just trying to fit the prayers in when we get a moment? Our decisions in regards to these actions will go a long way in determining whether or not we’ll be

successful. Paul said in **I Corinthians 9:24-27** that he made it his mission to discipline himself to do whatever it was that he needed to do for the Lord as he ran this race. Are we willing to do the same in order to show ourselves as being self-controlled.

Main Point/Conclusion: *In every situation, self-control must be the goal for those who belong to Christ.*

As I thought upon and prepared for this lesson, I couldn't help but keep coming back to the thought that self-control has so much more to do with the will and power of Jesus than it does our own power or will. If we live by our will then we will do as we please and not as Jesus pleases. When we try to rely upon our own strength then we will continually find ourselves failing to be what we know God desires for us to be. We must recognize that as disciples of Jesus the words of Paul in **Galatians 2:20** applies just the same to us. We have been crucified with Christ, He lives in and directs us, and we now belong to Him. As His servants He sets the pace and direction of our lives, and it is up to us to see the importance and value of controlling ourselves in order to please Him and be prepared for that day when He appears. The world might not be concerned with that day, but we best not only be concerned but also prepared by living with self-control in this unrestrained world.