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# **Self *Under* Control**

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**Series: The Fruit of the Spirit**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# Self *Under* Control

We talk a lot about the Christian life  
And we mean every word we say.  
But the thing that seems to slow us down  
Is *living it day after day*.

It isn't hard to be spiritual  
When you're sitting upright in the pew  
But then you go home and the telephone rings  
And you panic on hearing bad news.

It isn't hard to be spiritual  
When everything's going right  
But it's tough to rejoice, to sing and to praise  
In the dark of a lonely night

It's one thing to use those spiritual words  
At church with your Christian friends,  
But the words in your mind aren't always the same  
When the chorus you hear aren't "amens".

And isn't it true that after all,  
What the world is searching to find,  
Are Christians who really live the life  
In the midst of the daily grind?

Oh, dear, God, please teach us  
As we hear life's thunder roll  
To demonstrate to a dying world  
A life that is *under control*.

That is what this world is looking for—lives that are under control. That means lives that demonstrate love even when the object of that love is out to get you. That means lives that demonstrate joy when their world just fell apart. That means lives that demonstrate peace when everyone else is filled with agitation and fear. That means lives that demonstrate patience when the clock seems interminably slow, and the answers we've prayed for

haven't come. It means a life so filled with kindness that it gives itself away to a selfish, greedy world; a life that remains holy and pure where filth and immorality are the norm. It means a life that is supernaturally faithful, that remains at its station, even when all those around are fleeing to higher ground. It means a life that is gentle in its expression of life because of a meekness towards God that has changed its perspective. It is not someone doing an "above-average" job of living; it is someone who has stopped trying to live the Christian life and relinquished control to God.

So we come to the conclusion of our look at the ninefold fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22,23. I believe it to be significant that God concluded the list as He did. For the final fruit of the Spirit is the steering wheel that keeps the others on course. It is the engine that drives the Christian life. It is the actual response of the will to the decisions of life that *set Christ free to be Himself*.

#### THE DEFINITION

The King James Bible ends the list with a quality called "temperance". The NIV and almost all others use the word "self-control". The Greek word is "enkrateia". It comes from the word "kratos" meaning "strength". The word "temperance", in today's English, just isn't adequate. In our language, temperance has come to mean "moderation". People consider someone "temperate" if they aren't extreme or totally out of control. Using that definition, a murderer would be "temperate" if he only killed now and then. In our own strength, we can be "temperate", so that can't be what Paul meant. He was describing a quality that the natural man, apart from God, cannot possess...otherwise it could not be a fruit of God's Spirit. The word "self-control" is the better term, but *only if we understand what that means*. It does not mean "self in control". It is not mustering up enough inner strength to withstand evil or choose good. "Self-control" is the opposite of that. It is *self under control*; it is the natural man under the authority of the Spirit. Vine describes it: "the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God." The New College Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary defines self-control: "control of one's emotions, desires, or actions, by one's own will."

So we will define self-control this way:

Self-control is "the will responding to the Spirit of God over the objections of the emotions or appetites."

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Now the way the Spirit leads us is through His Word. So we might well add, *the will, responding to the Spirit through the Word, over the objections of the emotions and appetites.*

### THE APPLICATION

There is a two-fold application to this principle:

1- Self-control is God's final touch to the Spirit-controlled life. It is *behavior reflecting that the heart has been changed.* It is the Christian, free from anger, because just as his emotions are about to get out of control, he stops and submits to the word of God, which reminds him "do not sin by being angry". He feels anger, but rather than yield to that feeling, he stops and gives God control. The Spirit in him obeys the Word, ignoring his pent-up emotions. So what the world sees is calmness and control, rather than vindictiveness and hostility. It is the Christian, free from drunkenness, gluttony, or immorality, because anytime his appetites begin to take control, he yields control instead to the Spirit of God, who, in harmony with the Word of God, refuses to let the life go out of control.

The self-controlled life, then, is a life of *balanced restraint.* In fact, that's exactly how one concordance describes it. *It is the restrained, controlled Christian life, which makes all of its decisions based upon the will of God, rather than on what it wants to do or feels like doing.* That does not mean it is a life free from emotions. It means it is a life that is not controlled by emotions. There is a tremendous difference.

2- The second principle involved is that not only is "self-control" the final touch of the Spirit-controlled life, to a degree, it is the evidence that all the others exist. It is one thing to say you are filled with a Spirit of love. But if, when you come face to face with your enemies (those who do not have your best interest at heart), and your heart beats faster, and your mind races back to past injustices, and *you want revenge*, all your talk about love is meaningless. You can even preach sermons on the joy of the Lord, but if, when the phone rings, and your world is coming unraveled, you cannot control your fear, your messages of joy are idle chatter. If you claim to have victory over worry, but the uncertainties of the future leave you filled with anxiety, and you cannot control those emotions, forget your claims to victory; the world is not impressed.

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No, the world is not impressed with what we claim to be. The world is only impressed with lives that are under control when the heat is on, and the clouds are overhead, and the future is bleak. When there is no reason, naturally speaking, for you to be different, but you are, *then* they will be impressed. The proof that the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, etc. is in control of you is when *you are under God's control when it counts*.

In II Peter 1:6, we are admonished to “add to knowledge, self-control; and to our self-control, patience.” In other words, information develops accountability; accountability requires behavior; behavior demands a patient lifestyle which produces godliness. So the key to the world's being able to see God's fruit in us may well lie in this final evidence of his Presence. It may well be why “faith without works is dead”. It may be that unless a searching, longing world is able to see behavior commensurate with character, they have nothing on which to base their confidence that what we appear to be, we really are. So the final measure of whether Jesus is in control of your life and mine is the degree to which we live *controlled Christian lives*.

### THE DEMONSTRATION

Which brings us, of course, to the acid test. At what point, and in what situations can both we and the watching world determine if, indeed, ours are lives that have self under control. Let's ask God to give us some measuring sticks from the Scriptures to act as guidelines, or thermometers, if you will, to test the temperature of our disciplines. There are really two: our emotions and our appetites.

Test 1- Our emotions. We will look briefly at the measuring stick of anger. Proverbs gives us this word of caution:

He who is *slow to anger* is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit (is better) than he who takes a city.  
(Proverbs 16:32 NKJV)

The NIV translates that verse this way:

Better a patient man than a warrior, (better) a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

Scripture equates the controlling of your temper to the controlling of your spirit. It indicates that *the life which displays anger without choosing to, is not under the Spirit's control*. The anger of God, you see, is far different from the anger of man. It is

different in at least three ways:

a) Godly anger is an act of the will, not a response to the emotions. God does not lose control of his temper. *God never loses control, period.* Whenever God demonstrates anger, it is because He chooses to. It is a choice. So godly anger, that is, Christ in you, *will never be a reaction*; rather it will be a *deliberate response*. It means that if you get angry at your children, or your mate, or your boss you must stop immediately and ask the Spirit of God to take control and give you wisdom to respond to the Word, not to the circumstance. God in us will only display godly anger; and godly anger is always a choice.

b) Godly anger is directed primarily at Satan. Man gets angry at sinners; God gets angry at sin. Man gets angry at circumstances; God gets angry at the spiritual results of those circumstances. Man gets a wounded spirit when things don't go his way. God sees the problem from a heavenly perspective; and the source of His anger is almost always aimed, not at the person who wronged you, but at the person behind the person...the one whose avowed purpose it is to destroy your witness through uncontrolled anger.

c) God's anger is directed at an attack on His character or reputation, not ours. We get angry when someone defiles our name, or destroys our reputation; but that's not the issue. "We are not our own; we've been bought with a price." You and I have no reputation. Our Savior set the example. He "made Himself of no reputation," and became a servant (Philippians 2:5-8). We have a right; yea we have a *responsibility* to get angry when someone makes a movie, for instance, that defiles the Name of Jesus Christ and drags the reputation of the Living God in the mud. Our anger ought to be aimed at the enemy; and the cause of our anger ought to be clear: the perfect Holiness of God has been defamed. We cannot tolerate that. On the other hand, if men make fun of us, or make light of us, or lie about us, we are commanded to turn the other cheek, and "*if we take it graciously, this is pleasing to God.*" (I Peter 2:19,20). We are even commanded to "love our enemies; to do good to them who spitefully use us" (Matthew 5:44), and to consider ourselves blessed when men revile us, and persecute us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely." (Matthew 5:11-12).

The tough part about it, Beloved, is that obeying those principles removes about 95% of the things we get angry about,

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and *the 5% we ought to be angry over*, we usually overlook, because we are not personally affected. The problem is two-fold: 1) we don't understand the difference between godly anger and ungodly anger; and 2) we don't have our anger *under God's control*. We usually *react in anger* when our rights or reputation have been violated. The world sees men and women who preach one thing and live another. They see men and women whose lives are simply not under control, and they're not impressed.

*Anger is only one indicator of whether our emotions are under the Spirit's control.* There are, unfortunately, others. Fear—we are told in John 14 that Christ in us will never be afraid. So if you're afraid, you're not being led by the Spirit. Self is not under control. Another one is worry. We are told in Philippians 4 that we're never supposed to be worried. Christ in us doesn't worry; why should we? So, if you are worried, you are not under the Spirit's control. Self is not under control.

I'd like to focus for a minute on one that's even more uncomfortable than that one and it's the subject of envy. Envy causes us to make decisions that are based on greed or jealousy rather than contentment. We buy things, not based on calculated decisions after having consulted the Word for what is a need and what is a want; but rather based on a surge of desire to have something *that the flesh is telling us we can't live without*.

There may be missionaries on the field struggling to find enough money to buy food; there may be people in our own fellowship without a job, with no money to clothe their children for school; there may be people on our own block, who are sick and unable to work. But rather than weigh our needs against the needs of others, *we make our decisions based on how we feel about it*, rather than what the Scripture says we ought to do. So we buy, buy, buy. The more we buy, the more insatiable our desire for things become, *especially if others around us have more*. We get the new car we've always wanted. Instead of determining whether it is a need, we justify it based on our desires; and before long, we see that the Jones family has two new cars. Enter our new standard. Now two new cars is our basic minimum requirement. Envy. Discontentment. It is an evidence of a life that is not under God's control. God, remember, spends His time giving Himself away. Man, apart from God, spends his time getting what he can for himself. The two are not compatible. Self under control only buys what it has to have, and gives the rest away. *The more it*



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*studies God's perspective the less it has to have, so the more it has to give.* Self-control. No wonder it amazes a searching world.

Test 2- Are our appetites under control? Our appetites are different from emotions. Our emotions are our feelings sending signals to our wills based on longings or reactions. Appetites, on the other hand, rather than feeding the nerve ends of our feelings, feed the physical desires of our bodies instead. *The violations are, for the most part, normal appetites out of control.* It is normal to desire food. It satisfies our taste buds, satisfies the need of our bodies for nourishment, satisfies a habit we have come to like. Eating is a God-ordained function. Jesus ate. Jesus fed the disciples. Jesus attended dinners and invited others to do the same. But, remember, self under control will only eat what is needed; what it can afford; what will not cause others to stumble; and what will still leave enough for all who might have greater needs. Eating is not an end in Scripture; it is a means to an end. That's why whenever feeding the physical body became a hindrance to spiritual development, Jesus always chose to fast. Eating serves a two-fold purpose: to keep the body alive, and to provide an outlet for fellowship. But whenever it controls us; when we *have to eat a certain food*, we are out of control.

I believe that's why God's diet in the wilderness was so boring. Manna, manna, manna. The stuff was no culinary delight to start with, and the variety only required one line on the menu at the Cairo Hilton Restaurant. Why? Is that all God could think of? I think not. I think it's all God wanted His people to have, so they could concentrate on being thankful, rather than on feeding their appetites. But food, of course, is just one illustration, though it's the most common to all of us. Any appetite that controls us, rather than being fed by an act of the will in accord with the Word, does not come from God. *Anything that has within itself the chemical characteristics to create dependence, or to take control away from the Spirit, is deadly dangerous.*

That's why I believe the safest way to control a desire for alcohol is not to touch it. That's the ultimate in self-control. People may tell you it takes more self-control to drink a little, than to not drink at all. In fact, if you can't control eating chocolate, don't eat any. Then the temptation may be there, but you won't be feeding the temptation in the flesh, while daring God in the Spirit to control it. The appetites. Unless God in you controls them, they will control you, and sooner or later, no matter how strong

you think you are, out from under God's control, they will destroy you and your testimony as well.

### THE DETERMINATION

*The bottom line is how you deal with the appetites and the emotions that attempt to rule your life.* Test your anger. Test your envy. Test your gluttony. Test what you watch. Is it a calculated decision, based on what is Scripturally best for your eyes to see? Or do you watch what your appetites draw you to? Do you have the same control over what you eat in a luxurious buffet, as you do at a salad bar? Do you decide based on what is best, or do your appetites cry out to be satisfied, and you don't want to hurt their feelings?

Is your anger *totally* under control? Are your decisions to discipline, either in the home or on the job, based on an objective consideration of the facts, coupled with a review of Scriptural principles? Or do you react in anger first, and then wonder how to undo what you've done? Are you known at work for having a calm response when others are reacting in anger or fear or apprehension? You will be, if self is under control.

The controlled Christian life, then, is not a matter of strength, but of surrender. It isn't how strong you are, *it's how weak you know you are, that counts.* That, of course, once again, goes back to the "weakness-to-strength" principle in II Corinthians 12. *The weaker you are, the stronger God has a chance to be.* Whatever you can do apart from Him, you will. That's the law of human nature. Whatever you can't do, and know it, *you have to let Him do.* The decision to do that is the decision that ultimately sets God free to control your life.

That means that, if you have been known all your life as a man or woman who cannot control their temper, I have good news for you. You are one of the world's best candidates for glorifying God. He wants to control your temper. By now, you know you can't. Good. Now all you have to do is give that temper back to God. And every time Satan waves one of his red flags in front of you, just daring you to lose control, you must instantly remember, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes (or rules) a city." (Proverbs 16:32). Immediately, by meditating on that passage, God's Spirit will say to you, "Which would you rather be? Victor or vanquished?" You have a choice. In God's sight it is more important for you to yield

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your anger to Him and let Him respond through you than it is for you to be mayor of New York City. So, the second anger begins to boil, meditate on that passage. Stop immediately and begin praising God that He in you only gets angry at the right things at the right time, and that is almost never the things that cause you to erupt. As you praise Him, and as you consciously relinquish control, an amazing thing will happen. It will be as though you are not living in your body; someone else is. And that's true. *Supernaturally* (there's the key word), you will resist the devil, and God in you will respond properly. Where there is normally heated reaction, there will be calm response. Where there is normally violent behavior, there will be controlled discipline. Those about you will be expecting the worst, and will be amazed. They may even ask you what happened. You must be ready to give an answer...with meekness and fear. The answer is: *Jesus Christ in you doesn't react to emotions or appetites. He responds to His Father's Word, and does what His Father would have Him do. Period.*

Maybe you've never been able to control your appetite. Oh, you can go on a diet and lose weight, but that's not the same. On a day-to-day basis, you've never been able to eat what you should, instead of what you want. You've never been able to buy what you need, instead of what you covet. You've never been able to watch what is right, instead of what your eyes lust to see. That's not the Spirit-controlled life. Because the fruit of the Spirit is "self-control". That means "self under control". That means God in you cautiously, consciously deciding how to respond, and doing so, not based on how you feel, and not based on what your appetites crave, but rather *based on what God in you knows is best.*

Talk about freedom. Talk about liberty. Talk about victory. It is all yours, when you stop trying to control yourself, and start releasing control, minute by minute, to the only one who can control your self...Jesus Christ.

*(See poem next page.)*

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Self Under Control...  
That's living at last,  
Overcoming the bondage  
That's crippled the past.

No longer struggling,  
Trying to be...  
Finally, at last,  
Just letting Christ free.

Setting Him free  
To set anger aside,  
Those deadly emotions  
You've harbored inside.

Setting His Spirit  
Free to flow through,  
Your desires no longer  
Are controlling you.

Setting Him free  
To make you whole...  
At last, bringing  
*Self under control.*

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