

Russell Kelfer

Self-Control: Mirage or Miracle?

906-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Self-Control: Mirage or Miracle?

This is supposed to be a “transitional” lesson! Now a theoretical theological definition of a “transitional lesson” might go something like this: a lesson designed to form a bridge between two different but consecutive studies or subjects. (Got that? Sounds pretty good, eh?) However, perhaps a more accurate explanation would be “a half and half lesson you teach when you’re not through with a subject, but you either don’t have enough material for a whole hour, or are bored and anxious to get on to something else.”

So this is a transitional lesson. We’re not quite through becoming correctable, but we want to get on to having self-control. Hence the following outline:

- I- The Review (Wanted: Correctable Christians)
 - A- Some Basics to Remember
 - B- Some Warnings from the Word
 - C- Wanted: Correctable Christians: Four Steps to Correctability)
- II- The Overview: Back to the Four Faces of Wisdom
- III- The Preview: Self-control: mirage or miracle?
 - A- The farce of self-control (the world’s mirage)
 - B- The face of self-control (God’s miracle, the second face of wisdom)
 - C- The facets of self-control (where we are headed)
 - D- The reflections of a life under the Spirit’s control

First, back to the basics of a correctable spirit and a quick reminder of the reality of rebuke in God’s scheme of things. God has four ways to get our attention in order to rebuke us by bringing pressure into our lives to cause us to be changed.

BASIC REMINDER 1- The first is the pressure of the Word of God. Conviction is the process of turning knowledge into understanding. It is personalized rebuke by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7,8) through the Word (II Timothy 3:16). As you are reading

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the Word, meditating on the Word, or hearing the Word taught, God uses the Word to convict your spirit.

BASIC REMINDER 2- The second way to get our attention is the pressure of authority. You may ignore the Word, so God sends rebuke through those He has placed over you, (i.e. parents, husband, boss, teacher, judge, policeman, etc.) Their hearts are in His hand (Proverbs 21:1), and to resist them is to resist the pressure of God (Romans 13:2). But occasionally, we resist rebuke even by authority, so God uses His next kind of pressure.

BASIC REMINDER 3- This one is the pressure of God through counsel. It is the rebuke of God to you through those called alongside, (i.e. a family member, a friend, a fellow employee, a member of your Bible study group, or one to whom you have gone seeking counsel.)

BASIC REMINDER 4- God has also one other way to get our attention when we refuse to heed the rebuke of the Word, of authority, and of counsel. *We call it divine discipline*. It is the pressure of God through the circumstances of life. God uses the circumstances of your job, your family, your finances or your health (as He did with Job and with Paul) to get or to keep your attention in order to bring about change.

Just as there are four ways God rebukes us, there are four ways we can respond.

1- We may REACT; by responding emotionally with innocence or hurt. (“Who, me?” “I thought you loved me.”)

2- We may RETREAT or respond by running, and thus no longer be vulnerable to further rebuke. (The Jonah syndrome.)

3- We may REBEL and respond with open anger or retaliation. (Come up swinging!)

4- Or hopefully, we may REJOICE and respond with humility, repentance and joy because we see the correction as having come from God.

We learned that God may rebuke us in one of four ways, and we may respond in one of four ways. Then we learned that, in essence, HOW we respond to God’s rebuke will tell us a lot about ourselves, whether we are wise men and women, scorners, or fools. Lastly, we learned that HOW we counsel or rebuke others will be affected by whether or not they respond as a wise man (by rejoicing), as a fool (by retreating or reacting), or as a scorners (by

rebellious). What we found is this:

You REPROVE a wise man, and he will love you for it. You personalize the Word, reveal his blind spots, and counsel him in depth, relating his frame of reference to character, not circumstances.

You ADMONISH a fool. You share the principles, encourage application, pray for a softening of his spirit, and remain available; for remember, if left to himself, a fool is a scorner in the making.

But, you NEVER rebuke a scorner, nor do you argue with a scorner. You humor a scorner and drop in the truth as salt. You punish a scorner when it is logical to do so. (The Scripture says it teaches the simple when you do.) Then you leave a scorner to reap what he has sown, praying that in due time his eyes may be opened and his knowledge turned to understanding.

So how you respond to those whose lives touch yours may well be dependent upon how they respond to the rebukes of life, those pressures God uses to cause them to change. That is where we have been. Now before we wrap up the subject of correctability, there are some additional Scriptural principles that must be included for this study to be faithful to the whole counsel of the Scripture. They are some words of warning from the Word, if you will. We will not spend much time here, but we must consider them. If you are seeking counsel or rebuke, here are some words of warning:

HOW TO SEEK COUNSEL OR REBUKE FROM THE WORD

Word 1- Seek counsel from those who have developed godly lives, who have the qualities you desire.

The godly man gives wise counsel.

(Proverbs 10:31 paraphrase)

Here are some tests to apply.

A- Look for those whose lives are in demand. If need be, make an appointment and wait.

The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.

(Proverbs 10:21)

B- Look for those who fellowship with wise men; check their friendships.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

(Proverbs 13:20)

You can tell what a man is really like by the friends he keeps.

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C- Look for those who use the Scripture wisely.

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” (Proverbs 15:2)

Word 2- Seek counsel from those who love you enough to rebuke you.

He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue. (Proverbs 28:23)

Word 3- Seek counsel from those who love you enough to encourage you as well, who not only rebuke but also refresh you.

The advice of a wise man refreshes like water from a mountain spring. Those accepting it become aware of the pitfalls on ahead. (Proverbs 13:14 TLB)

In other words, a counselor who batters you but does not pick up the pieces leaves you a wreck.

Word 4- If someone’s counsel is of the world and not of the Word, do not go back for more.

Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. (Proverbs 19:27)

The Living Bible paraphrases this verse:

Stop listening to teaching that contradicts what you know is right. (TLB)

If your counselor counsels from the world’s perspective, leave him to counsel the world.

Word 5- When in doubt, confirm counsel through other counsel.

For by wise counsel thou shalt make war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. (Proverbs 24:6)

That, of course, does not mean that you keep going to new people until you find someone to confirm your position. It does mean that if your spirit does not bear witness that the counsel you received is of the Word, you verify that counsel through other counselors before you accept it as from the Lord.

Those were some principles to remember on SEEKING counsel. Now here are a few on GIVING counsel. These are words of warning from the Word on giving counsel or rebuke.

HOW TO GIVE COUNSEL FROM THE WORD

Word 1- Always rebuke or counsel in love. You may be an

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expert in the Word and have such godly discernment that you know what is really wrong with everyone else's life, but if you fail to speak the truth in love, (Ephesians 4:15), your counsel will fall on deaf ears. People want to know they are loved; then they will listen.

Word 2- Never condescend in counseling. Remember, you are not above having the same problems or doing the same things.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

(Galatians 6:1)

Conversely, if you are being counseled by someone who says, "This could never happen to me because...", make a move for the door. Pride goeth before a fall, and he is not considering himself lest he also be tempted.

Word 3- Remember the lives of those we help are God's best mirrors to reveal our own sins. God may have sent that person to you not because you have all the answers, but because you are headed down the same path he is, and God was hoping to give you an illustration in living color of what is ahead for you.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:3-5)

God says you don't do eye surgery if you cannot see, nor do you counsel or rebuke until you have taken inventory of your own life in the very area in which you are counseling. If your finances are a mess, do not become an authority on finances for everybody else. First, clean up your own act. If you are not a success on the job, do not counsel others on how to be one; deal with your job first. If your marriage is shaky, do not become a marriage counselor. Before you point the finger of rebuke at another for uncontrollable anger, be sure YOUR temper is under control. God may have sent them to you to deal with YOU, so you could then, with vision cleared, deal with them. Remember the Mote and the Beam Principle; it is vital to achieve God's double-edged objectives in counseling.

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Word 4- Do not judge motives! You do not know another man's heart. You may see his problems, but you cannot see his thoughts.

Judge not that you be not be judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matthew 7:1,2)

As a corollary to this, one of the greatest dangers men face in counseling is that if God uses them, they can easily forget that it was God who used them. They begin to stand in the place of God who alone knows the hearts of men.

Word 5- Do not rebuke an elder.

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;

The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. (I Timothy 5:1,2)

The word "elder" used in this passage does not speak of the elders or ministers of the church; nearly all of the commentaries agree on that point. It rather speaks of those who are older by virtue of years, maturity, or spiritual position. They may or may not be elders in the church.

The issue is you are to respect those who are more mature than you. The illustration is one of a child entreating or begging with respect, that his father reconsider his position rather than a surly or sarcastic putting down of those who, by the very nature of their age, deserve your respect. You do not rebuke your parents; you entreat them. You do not rebuke your elders, those who by virtue of age, character, or long standing leadership deserve your honor and respect.

Word 6- If you are in a position of spiritual leadership or teaching, you are commanded to rebuke as a part of your ministry, when rebuke is needed. It is not an elective, but a requirement.

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. (Titus 2:15a)

This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. (Titus 1:13)

Preach the Word; be instant (ready) in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (II Timothy 4:2)

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The Scripture is filled with illustrations of this. We see:

- rebuke for unbelief (Mark 16:14)
- rebuke for hypocrisy (Matthew 23:13)
- rebuke for unfaithfulness (Luke 22:34)
- rebuke for disobedience (Matthew 3:7)
- rebuke for greed (Acts 8:20)
- rebuke for divisiveness (I Corinthians 1:10)
- rebuke for accepting immorality (I Corinthians 5:1-5)
- rebuke for abusing the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:17-22)

So we see that in season and out, whether it is popular or not, rebuke must be given in love, but it must be given.

Word 7- If a pastor or spiritual leader is guilty of some sin, follow Scriptural guidelines in rebuking them.

Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.
(I Timothy 5:19,20)

In other words, a pastor, elder, or anyone in spiritual leadership found in sin, should first be spoken to privately with two or three sound witnesses present. The next step if he is found to be guilty of a sin that endangers his public ministry, is to take the rebuke public in the area in which he ministers so that others may see the serious nature of it and as Scripture describes it, "fear."

So we bid farewell to this somewhat painful subject of correction. We leave it with a reminder that God is looking for correctable Christians. Keep in mind also that there are four stages of correctability. We ought not to be satisfied until we have reached Level Four.

Level I is availability. It involves being where you can be corrected: under the Word, under authority, open to counsel, sensitive to circumstances. (Proverbs 10:21 and 13:1 explain what I mean.)

Level II is accountability. It involves an open spirit, a correctable attitude when rebuke comes your way. (Proverbs 5:22, 8:33, 12:15, and 21:29 are good illustrations.)

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Level III is appropriation. This is the process not only of being available to be rebuked and open to the rebuke you receive, but also being quick to apply the rebuke, to repent and be changed.

Level IV is anticipation. This involves a spirit that is available and correctable and a person who applies his heart to wisdom, promptly applying the rebuke he receives.

It is a spirit so humble it actually looks for correction. It is a person who actually gets excited at the anticipation of finding his or her blind spots and correcting them, so that he or she can be more godly, growing more and more into HIS likeness. That is the goal of God for every Christian, to have a heart longing for correction because correction leads to wisdom.

As we close this chapter of our study on correction, we close the book on our look at the first of the four faces of wisdom as well. As you may remember, our study of the book of Proverbs was to be a topical look at many of the eighty or more subjects found in the thirty-one chapters of this, God's picture book of principles for attaining wisdom.

Furthermore, we determined some eleven lessons ago that our study would take the form of a look at the progressive unfolding of wisdom, that is, the mind of Christ in control of the Christian. To that end, we began with what appeared to be man's most basic problem: the perennial problem of pride. We then looked at the high cost of humility and finally came to the conclusion that at the foundation of wisdom were three basic truths: Self is dead, Christ is alive, and the battle is not ours, but God's.

We then discovered that coming to deal with those facts experientially frees us to be teachable, to become treasure-hunting Christians—men and women who search the Scriptures as a miner searching for hidden gold.

However, we found that even humble, teachable Christians cannot achieve real wisdom unless they become correctable, open to rebuke and anxious to change. When these concepts become wisdom in us with the mind of Christ controlling us, we are on our way to REAL spiritual growth—being yielded, teachable, and correctable.

But that is only the beginning, for now we see that the book of Proverbs unfolds another chapter of our quest for wisdom by surfacing on nearly every page the need for self-control: godly

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restraint in our attitudes, godly restraint in our appetites, and godly restraint in our actions and activities.

All through the book of Proverbs the humble, correctable saint is instructed: to behave, to mind his manners (spiritually speaking), to keep a rein on excesses, to guard his eyes against what they shouldn't see, to guard his lips against what they shouldn't taste, to guard his tongue against what it shouldn't say, to guard his feet against where they shouldn't go.

Proverbs is a panoramic portrait of a life under control; but we could not study godly self-control until we had studied godly humility, because self-control with self alive is a sickening form of legalism. It says that man behaves, and because he behaves, he becomes godly. NO! The cults say that. Christianity says that you do not become godly because you behave, but rather that you behave because you have become godly. Self-control is not self in control; it is self under control, the control of the Spirit.

What I trust we will discover or rediscover these next few weeks is that the Spirit-controlled Christian can tell the Spirit is in control by HOW he behaves under certain conditions. For instance:

- The Spirit-filled Christian is not a glutton, so the Christian in the act of gluttony is not under the control of the Spirit.

- The Spirit-filled Christian is not a drunkard, so the Christian in the act of drunkenness is not under the control of the Spirit.

- The Spirit-filled Christian does not have his temper out of control, so when he flies into a rage, he is not under the control of the Spirit.

- The Spirit-filled Christian does not use his tongue to slander or gossip or lie, so the Christian whose tongue sets lives on fire is not operating totally under the Spirit's control.

The issue is not believe and behave, the issue is how you behave. How you behave shows what you believe and who is in control of your life. If you were anxious to get through with pride and on with correction to get to something less painful, you are facing a new problem in the next few weeks. We are going to take a look at what life is like when the Spirit maintains control, so we are going to preview briefly what the next portion of our study holds in store. We will call it "Godly Self-Control."

The reason we called this lesson, "Self-control: Mirage or

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Miracle?” is because only the Christian under the Spirit’s control can experience the miracle of self-control that the book of Proverbs describes as the normal Christian life. To the unbeliever or to the believer to whom “self” is still alive, self-control is a mirage, an unattainable pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of self-discipline. To anyone not under the control of the Spirit, self-control is the impossible dream, but it need not be. God’s kind of self-control, that is, self under control, is ours for the asking.

What is self-control? The New College Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary defines self-control as “control of one’s emotions, desires, or actions by one’s own will.” Now it is hard to find much fault with that definition: the emotions, desires, and actions controlled by the will. The definition is all right, but the application is the problem, because man does not have the power to do the right thing unless Christ does it in him. So self-control without the Spirit’s control is like choosing to go to Europe in a plane with no engine. It’s a swell idea; it just will never get you anywhere.

So what God has done is given us the power to become, then given us a workbook with all He wants us to become spelled out clearly and powerfully. All He wants us to do, then, is minute by minute, knowing His will, choose to let Him in us do it. As we choose to let Him, He controls our appetites, our attitudes, and our activities; and we become the reflections of godly self-control.

The mirage becomes a miracle, and our behavior begins to reflect our beliefs. Our lives begin to reflect our love. Christ in us is giving us the power to make right choices. So our emotions, our desires, and our actions are under the control of our will.

We will describe self-control for the Christian, then, as “the deliberate choices of the will in harmony with the Word under the control of the Spirit.” With God’s kind of self-control, you do not eat because your emotions or appetites see food. You eat because you so choose, and God gives you the power to eat when you choose and what you choose.

If you do not get angry or jealous or fearful, it is because you choose not to. Likewise, you do not buy something because you “just got carried away and couldn’t help yourself.” God’s Spirit in you only buys by deliberate choice, in harmony with Scriptural principles, what you need, when you need it, and if you can afford it.

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Self-control is no option in Scripture. In Titus 1:8, a spiritual leader, in order to be a spiritual leader, must exhibit self-control. In II Peter 1:6 the godly believer in the unfolding of the process of maturity adds to his knowledge, self-control. In Gal. 5:23, we read that the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

In other words, God in us always manifests self-control as a reflection of His perfect character which always acts “in accordance with the purposes of His will”. God never acts without so choosing. He never gets caught off guard and violates His purposes by acting without thinking. To do so would deny His nature. Jesus, demonstrating what it was like to be a man totally under God’s control, also never once acted outside of a deliberate choice to do the Father’s will—never! So Christ in us is never found to be acting based on emotions or appetites. He always does what He chooses to do, if we choose to let Him.

What we are going to do in these next few chapters, then, is look at some of the enemies of self-control. These are appetites, attitudes, and activities that vie for control of our lives. Each of them is addressed in the book of Proverbs. Each of them is an enemy to some of us. Some of them are enemies to all of us, but these things either control Christians or demonstrate that Christians are out of control. If the miracle of self-control is to take control of us, we must meet them head on in the next few weeks. Some enemies of the controlled Christian life are impulsiveness, anger, jealousy, fear, lust, greed, uncontrolled tongue, gluttony, immorality, ambition, retaliation, stubbornness, problem thought life, temptation, and drunkenness.

THE CONTROLLED CHRISTIAN LIFE:

The controlled Christian life is a life of deliberate choices of the will, in harmony with the Word, under the control of the Spirit. As we close this chapter, we will begin by simply naming them, defining them, and describing them as the enemies of the Christ-controlled life. You may identify with some of them. I will give you definitions so you can examine your heart.

Enemy 1: A spirit of impulsiveness. Impulsiveness is decision-making based on appetites and emotions, rather than on the principles of Scripture. On the other hand, wise decision-making might be defined as the ability to defer decisions until God reveals His choice.

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Enemy 2: Unrighteous anger, which is the response of Satan to being wronged (having one's temper out of control). Righteous anger, however, is the response of God both to sin and the resulting defiance of His character.

Enemy 3: Jealousy or a Satanic desire to possess people. It is stealing ownership of individuals from God, thus claiming rights you do not have.

Enemy 4: Fear is the absence of confidence in God.

Enemy 5: Lust is desire in control of the mind.

Enemy 6: Greed is an unhealthy attachment to or desire for possessions. It is having "things" in control of the mind.

Enemy 7: The uncontrolled tongue, a flame of fire no man can tame. We also need to look at such reflections of that fire as

- a) Boasting-the tongue exalting self.
- b) Bad report- the tongue reflecting a negative spirit.
- c) Flattery-the use of words to gain acceptance.
- d) Gossip-repeating information at the cost of character.
- e) Judging-using the tongue to assume the role of God.
- f) Sarcasm-using the tongue to destroy, under the guise of humor.
- g) Immoral speech-using the tongue as a garbage dispenser.
- h) Nagging-using the tongue as sandpaper to wear down another's resistance.
- i) Meddling-using the tongue to invade another's privacy.
- j) Blasphemy-using the tongue to compromise the character of God. The misused tongue is a flame of fire no man can tame, but God can.

Enemy 8: A spirit of gluttony, which is the stomach in control of the mind.

Enemy 9: Immorality is the deliberate violation of the image of God through union with Satan. It includes fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and all forms of behavior which deviate from the portrait of salvation in Scripture. (Man's physical relationship

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with his wife is a portrait of God's spiritual relationship with His bride, the Church. So any compromise is blasphemy.)

Enemy 10: Ambition is the quest for success that overrides the will of God.

Enemy 11: A spirit of retaliation is the process of returning evil for evil in defiance of the Word of God. Retaliating is stealing from God His right to vengeance, thus robbing Him of an opportunity to reveal Himself.

Enemy 12: A stubborn spirit, that is, man's refusal to change or accept correction.

Enemy 13: Problem thought life, when Satan is controlling the mind through the deceit of neutrality. It is listening to the voice of the Stranger, thinking you are talking to yourself.

Enemy 14: Drunkenness is yielding control of the mind and body to a counterfeit of the Spirit-filled life. It is the mind under the control of any addicting agent.

Enemy 15: Temptations, man's other varied opportunities from within and without to reject the mind of Christ.

These are just some of the tools Satan uses to control the Christian. However, God never intended us to be controlled by any of them. He intends instead for us to learn how to recognize each appetite, each attitude, and each activity; and then upon recognition, to learn how to choose to let HIM take control. Remember, Christ IN control gives perfect SELF-control in every situation.

The problem most of us face is that we can sit here and talk about anger or jealousy or gossip or boasting and think that by feeling convicted, we are becoming mature. That's understanding, but that is not wisdom. Knowing jealousy or envy is wrong is NOT DOING the will of God. Knowing jealousy or envy is wrong is KNOWING the will of God. Not being jealous or envious IS the will of God.

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?
let him show by how he behaves his works with meekness
and wisdom.

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory
not, and lie not against the truth. (James 3:13,14)

[Because by glorying you make the truth a lie.]

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To know the will of God about anger is not doing the will of God. To do the will of God, you stop being angry.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:31,32)

We say, "Oh, if only I knew the will of God, I'd do it!" You do know the will of God! Stop being angry, start being kind. Stop being bitter, start forgiving. NOW! Remember, God never commanded you to do something He did not empower you to do!

For it is God which worketh in you both to will [to choose] and TO DO of His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

It is not a matter of power. We read:

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power (His power) that worketh in us.

Unto to Him be glory...

(Ephesians 3:20,21a)

It is not a matter of power; it is a matter of choice! The miracle of self-control becomes a reality.

Are you tired of being controlled by your appetites, by gluttony, immorality, drunkenness? Are you tired of being controlled by your desires of lust, greed, and ambition? Are you tired of being controlled by your emotions of anger, jealousy, and fear? We all are! God has something more in store for us than that, much more. He wants us to humble ourselves, give ourselves to the Word, and become open to correction. Then HE WANTS TO CORRECT US. As He does, He wants to restore control of our lives to our wills, and thus restore order. This is so that the world, looking for a God of order, might see Him in us, as He in us has us under control.

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