

Self-Control | Dan Greene

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Date: 29 September 2024

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[0:00] Okay. I heard about a flight instructor who had a student up in his single engine Cessna.

! He turned to his student pilot and said, son, I think it's time to take her in for a landing. Are you ready to go down? The student looked at him and said, no problem, let's do it.

As they were approaching the runway, the instructor looked over at the student and he was amazed at what he saw because he was as cool as a cucumber. Normally when a student pilot was doing his first landing, he was sweating bullets.

He was nervous. He was wide-eyed. This guy was as cool as could be. And so he thought to himself, this guy is going to make a tremendous pilot. Then the plane hit the runway with a thud and bounced 50 feet into the air.

Came down, bounced again, went 30 feet into the air. Hit a third time, blew all the tires out. Ran off the runway, ended up upside down in a cornfield.

[1:09] There they were strapped upside down looking at each other. The instructor said, son, I have to be honest with you, that's the worst first landing any student of mine has ever made.

And the student looked back at him and said, me, I thought you were landing the plane. I think that's an apt description of people's lives today.

They're in the cockpit. They seem to be in control. They're cool as the other side of the pillow. But they're about to make a crash landing.

Have you noticed that we live in a society that is totally out of control? We are financially out of control. Collectively as a nation, we now owe over 35 trillion dollars in debt.

And individually, Americans are the most indebted people on earth. We owe more per household than any other country in the world. In fact, if you take mortgage out of the equation, the average household owes about 244,000 in mortgage debt.

[2:31] But if you take that out of the equation, the average household in America owes \$104,215 in debt.

We have more credit card debt in America than the gross national product of 92% of the other countries.

Professional golfer Doug Sanders once said, I'm working as hard as I can to get my life and my cash to run out at the same time. If I can die right after lunch on Tuesday, my plan will work out. I think that's the flight plan for most Americans. We're financially out of control. We are physically out of control.

Did you know that every day in America, we eat 75 acres of pizza? Every day in America, we eat 53 million hot dogs.

[3:42] Every day in America, we ate 167 million eggs. Every day in America, we eat 3 million gallons of ice cream.

And then we follow that up with 3,000 tons of candy. Meanwhile, every day in America, we spend 2 million, \$22,000 on exercise equipment.

Every day in America, we spend 3 million, \$561,644 on tortilla chips. We spend 3 million, \$10,959 on potato chips.

We spend 3 million, \$10,959 on potato chips. We drink 524 million servings of Coca-Cola. And we eat 2,739,726 Dunkin' Donuts.

And that's not counting Krispy Kreme. Meanwhile, every day in America, 101,280,321 adults go on a diet.

[4:59] If you go to Amazon.com, you know how many diet books are listed on there presently? 1,214. Talk about schizophrenic.

One California pathologist says that on the basis of autopsies, he has performed 2 out of 3 deaths are premature. And he attributes them to 3 major problems.

Smoker's lungs, drinker's liver, and loafer's heart. Recent studies by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta revealed that 60% of Americans do absolutely no regular exercise.

There are two words we hate to hear. Discipline and exercise. Most of us are like the guy who said, you know what I do every time I think about exercising?

I just sit down and rest until the feeling goes away. We're physically out of control. We're emotionally out of control.

[6:10] Used to be you could take a drive to relax. Now if you get on the highway, you're going to encounter road rage. And you better be careful who you honk at today.

Our schools and office buildings have become shooting fields. Our homes that ought to be havens have become hazards. The whole home ought to be a place of peace.

Instead today it's a place of peril. And phrases like verbal abuse, physical abuse, spouse abuse, child abuse should not be in the vocabulary.

But they are. We're emotionally out of control. We're morally out of control. Try to guess who said this.

In 2008. I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage. He went on to say that same sex marriage is unstrategic against his religious beliefs.

[7:18] beliefs and something that should be in the hands of churches rather than government. In 2008 that statement was made by Barack Obama.

It shocked me that four years later in 2012 he publicly affirmed that same sex couples should be able to get married.

But what's more shocking is the churches actually beat him. In 2005 the United Church of Christ allowed same sex marriages. In 2009 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America followed suit and three years later the Episcopal Church put their blessings on same sex marriage.

Now I'm a strong proponent of civil liberty but sodomy is not a civil right. It's moral sin.

And we're morally out of control. Proverbs 25 28 says, like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.

[8:39] Now in Old Testament times cities were typically built on top of a hill. And the thing that protected that city were the walls. And when the walls came down they were defenseless.

That's what happened to Jericho. And Solomon is saying that when the walls of self-control come down in a person's life they are totally defenseless.

And the enemy can have their way with that person. We live in the midst of a society filled with people with unwalled cities.

We live in a society filled with people who are totally out of control. But Paul's words in Galatians 5 23 still ring true today.

The fruit of the spirit is self-control. Let me show you how crucial that is. If you take your Bibles and look at 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

[9:37] I want to show you what's probably a familiar passage to you. 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 24.

He says, do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

Now we have marathon races today. And I would argue that most of the people that enter a marathon race have the goal simply to finish.

Others enter the marathon race with the goal of winning the race. Some enter just to get the t-shirt that says I finished. Some enter to get the trophy.

And of course what Paul has in mind here is the Olympic kind of race. And so some people even Olympics reach to enter to say I just hope I'll finish in the top three so I'll get a bronze medal.

[10:41] But some people enter to say I'm after the gold. I want to win. I want to win. And what is it that distinguishes those who want to win?

Look at the next verse. Verse 25. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.

Self-control is the same Greek word as Galatians chapter 5 in the fruit of the Spirit. And Paul is saying what is true in an Olympic race is true in life.

The difference between victory and defeat in your life is self-control. If you want to win in the race of life, you've got to figure out how to get self-control.

Now with that in mind, let me ask you a few questions. Number one, are you out of control?

[11:47] You say, well, no, I'm not out of control. I'm quite in control. I feel like I've got a pretty good handle on my life. Okay, let me ask you three more particular questions.

Number one, do you have control of your body? Here are some people's thoughts on exercise. I joined a health club last year, spent about 40 bucks.

Haven't lost a pound. Apparently you have to show up. I don't exercise at all. If God meant for us to touch our toes, he would have moved them further up our bodies.

I like long walks, especially when they're taken by people who annoy me. I have flabby thighs, but fortunately my stomach covers them.

Listen, I drive far too fast to worry about cholesterol. I don't jog, it makes the ice jump out of my glass.

[12:55] Excuses for exercising are funny, or for not exercising are funny, but it's not funny when we make excuses for not controlling our body in the spiritual arena.

That's why in the passage I just read in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul tells us we have to have self-control to win. And then he gives this example in 1 Corinthians 9, 27, and he says, but I discipline my body and make it my slave.

I like the old King James. The old King James says, I buffet my body. I think B-U-F-F-E-T. I think most of us buffet our bodies.

But to buffet your body is to beat it like a boxer and make it your slave.

You say, well, why do I have to defeat my body and make it my slave? Well, because if you don't control your body, guess what? Your body will control you.

[14:18] And that's the truth of it. And so self-discipline is essential if we're going to win in the spiritual race.

That's why 1 John 2, 16 says, for all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Everything that's in the world is not out there somewhere. It's here. It's the lust of my flesh, my body. It's the lust of my eyes. It's my pride inside of me.

So the enemy has inside connections. And that's how he gets at you and me. And I don't know about you, but my flesh, my body is shouting at me every day.

And it's giving me commands that are contrary to God's commands to me. Your body says, every morning your body probably says, let's not get out of bed.

[15:25] Every morning your body starts out saying, feed me, feed me, feed me. Or I don't feel like going to church. Or satisfy my every sensual desire.

Or pamper me. I want, I want, I want. That's the nature of our fleshly body. And that's why Paul said in Romans 12, 1, you are to present your what?

Body as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Now we usually want to spiritualize that and say, well, it's my intentions that I need to give.

But it's my thoughts I need to give. It's my spiritual side I need to give. But specifically he says, I want you to present your body as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

So when it comes to your body, are you out of control? Second particular question. Do you have control of your mind?

[16:25] What's the next verse say in Romans 12, in verse 2? Paul says, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. How?

By the renewing of your mind. Your mind needs to be renewed. It needs to be reprogrammed. One of the things that bothers me most is when people tell me, well, I've always thought.

And I think, well, stop thinking what you've always thought and get your mind renewed by the word of God. Christians have no reason to say, I've always thought.

Because the majority of what you've always thought is wrong. And you need to reprogram that mind by the truth of God.

As Paul says in Philippians 4, 8, we're to start thinking or start dwelling on things that are true and honorable and right and pure and lovely.

[17:35] And how do you do that? You have to have self-control. You have to have self-control over what you're watching on TV or what you're watching on the computer.

You have to have self-control over what you're listening to. You have to have self-control over what you're reading or what you're thinking about.

And that's a challenge. Have you ever noticed that when you begin to set aside time to read the scriptures, your mind is going to come up with all kinds of alternatives?

As soon as you start reading, your mind says, we need to check email. We need to look on Facebook and see what our friends are doing right now.

We need to just daydream or watch the news or do something other than get into the scriptures and renew my mind. Or when you set aside time to pray, I guarantee you that your mind is going to remember all kinds of other things you need to be doing.

[18:49] That's why Paul used a battle analogy in 2 Corinthians 10, 5 when he says, we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Thoughts are coming at you left and right. And we need to capture those thoughts and take them captive to obedience in Christ. The battle is won or lost in your mind.

And we need to be self-controlled in our mind so that we're like the watchman on the wall, catching those thoughts and bringing them in submission and obedience to Christ.

Here's a third particular question I want to ask you. Do you have control of your tongue?

The average person engages in 30 conversations a day. They say that you spend one fifth of your life talking.

[19:53] You will speak enough words in one year to fill 132 books, 400 pages long.

Someone has said, talk is cheap because supply exceeds demand. I like to say when all is said and done, more will have been said than done.

The average man speaks 20,000 words a day. The average woman speaks 30,000 words a day.

That's why when you get home from work, you've spent your 20,000 and she's still talking. But we're a nation of talkers.

We got talk radio, email, blogs, vlogs, interactive TV, cell phone, text, Facebook, X.

[20:54] We're just talking all the time, whether it's with our tongue or with our fingertips. With all that talk, at some point your mouth is going to get you in trouble.

And when our mouth gets us in trouble, what do we usually say? I don't know where that came from. I didn't mean to say that.

I have no idea how that came out of my mouth. But James kind of tells us, James says in James 3, 6, and I think Christians often overlook that it says the tongue is a fire.

And then it says this, it is set on fire by hell. And he's talking to Christians there. That's an amazing statement.

Your tongue is a fire that's set on fire by hell. And so there's a direct natural gas line that runs from hell to your tongue.

[21:57] And so you better get it under control or it's going to control you. In fact, earlier in James 3, James tells us that the tongue is like a bit in a horse's mouth.

If you control the bit, you control the whole horse. If you control your tongue, you control your whole body.

And if you don't control your tongue, here's what James says in James 1, 26. I like James a lot.

James is called the New Testament man from Missouri. He's like the guy who says show me.

And so he gets practical. But here's what he says. If anyone thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

It is God in control. It is the fruit of the Spirit of God produced in me. In fact, the paradox is this. I actually gain control by giving up control. Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus in contrast to what we're hearing all around us.

[28:05] In Luke 9, 23, he said, If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself. Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Society says deify yourself. Jesus says deny yourself. So in your life, who is in control? Now it's not easy to give up control, so let me ask you a third question. Who is going to die? Let me explain that.

If you're in Galatians 5, look at verse 24. Paul says, Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The only way to bring self under control is that self has to die. It's not good enough to give self Advil.

[29:21] It's not good enough to give self tranquilizers. Self has to die. And self will not die accidentally.

Self only dies one way, and that is by crucifixion. Self only dies on the cross. Paul illustrates this for us back in Galatians 2.20, and you may have to help me with this because I'm going to quote it. But he says, I, speaking of self, I have been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

And the life that I now live, and the life I now, help me out. In the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Good. We got through that. Thank you. But that's the same idea. I have to die to self before I experience the life that God has for me.

[30:32] There was a great preacher that lived about 100 years ago named S.D. Gordon, and he said this, In every man's life there is a throne, and when self is on that throne, Christ is on the cross.

And when Christ is on that throne, self is on the cross. Now, I've been convicted before about the idea of a throne in my life, and me being on the throne, or Jesus being on the throne, but I haven't really heard this idea, which is a little more convicting to me, that when I'm on the throne of my life, I'm actually putting Christ back on the cross.

And when Christ is on the throne of my life, I'm willingly putting self on the cross.

And that's why I'm asking the question, who's going to die? Someone once asked George Mueller what was the secret of his life, and George Mueller said, there was a day when George Mueller died.

He died to his ambitions, his goals, his wants, and his desires. And he said, once and for all, Christ is my life, and my life totally belongs to him.

[31:59] There's only room for one on the cross. Who's on the cross in your life? Who's going to die? And then a fourth question.

Who is going to live? Listen to the way A.W. Tozer describes it. It is never fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful.

Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus, and it is what the cross would do to everyone to set him free. The cross is rough, and it's deadly, but it's effective.

And it does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when its work is finished, and the suffering victim dies. After that is resurrection, glory, and power, and the pain is forgotten for joy.

We see that same principle in Galatians chapter 5. Look at verse 24 again. He says, Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh.

[33:18] And then verse 25. If we live by the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit. So you see this death to self, and then you see this life in the Spirit. And having said that, let me point out just two truths about this, and this is what we'll close with.

First obvious thing I see here is that resurrection only comes after the cross. You won't have life in Christ until you have death to self.

There's a verse in Philippians 3.10 that most Christians only quote half of. And that's where Paul says his really ambition in life, and he says, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.

And most Christians stop there and say, yeah, I like that. I want to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection. But you know what the rest of the verse says? That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

What's fellowship mean? Sharing together with. I want to share together in Jesus' suffering. And then it says, and be conformed to his death.

[34:46] To get resurrection power, you have to enter into conformity to Jesus. Death. That's the progression. Death comes first, then life.

Resurrection power only operates on one kind of person, and that's a dead person. resurrection power only happens in cemeteries.

And for most of us, the problem is, we're in the cemetery, but we won't lay down. We won't die to self so that we can experience the life that's only found through resurrection.

That's the first obvious thing I see here. The second is, self-control is not a work. It's fruit.

And in this passage, he talks about walking in the Spirit, so self-control is not a work. It's a walk. It's not something I work at in my power.

[35:54] It's something I walk in, in the Spirit's power. So if you're working today to get control of yourself, you're doomed to fail because you can't do it.

And some of you may be sitting here today in honesty in your heart and saying, you know, I've kind of made a mess of my life. Well, that doesn't surprise me if self is in control because that's the only thing that self can lead us to is a plane crash.

True self-control is not the fruit of self-effort. It's the fruit of the Spirit and if you will not live in the Spirit and if you will not live in the Spirit let me re-say that.

If you want to live in the Spirit, you have to first die in the flesh. So let me close with this thought.

As you sit here this morning, I know that one or two things, one of two things are true about you.

Either you are controlling self or self is controlling you.

[37:39] That's your only two options. And you cannot control self except by the power of the Spirit.

So if you're sitting here this morning and in honesty, you're saying, you know, I've got a problem with lust.

I've got a problem with alcohol. I've got a problem with my thought life. I've got a problem with my tongue. I've got a problem with my time.

What's the answer? Get down off the throne and get up on the cross and pray a simple prayer or something like this.

I'm asking you, Lord Jesus, to take the throne of my life and take control of me. It's that simple.

[38:44] But it's the death through which you will experience His resurrection life. And the truth is, that's a daily activity.

Doesn't happen one time. But if it's never happened for you, you've never experienced the paradox of that, then today is your day. Because once you've experienced it, you want to go back and back and back and say, I want to be on the cross.

Because that's where I experience the true life that Jesus gives me. The abundant life that He wants me to walk in. Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word today.

Thank You for this concept of self-control, which is a little confusing because it's really allowing You to be in control. And Father, I pray that we would realize the principle that the Gospel is just not only about You dying for us, but us dying with You.

And Lord, as we die with You, we then experience the life that You have for us in its fullness. And I pray, Lord, that we would all grow to understand that and experience that in our lives today.

[39:58] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.