

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS SELF-CONTROL

John 15:4-5, 8-10

Newbegun United Methodist Church

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The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Self-control is the final fruit and this will be our final message on the Fruit of the Spirit. I hope you have become prepared in your heart to receive the message and to promise to practice self-control all next week – along with the other eight fruit you have become aware of. Last week we lifted up the fruit of gentleness. Gentleness is love touching – a touching for healing and restoration. How did you do? Are there any testimonies of how the Holy Spirit used your power of gentleness to heal or restore? Any stories about the other fruit? Are you being fruit producers? Anyone have the fruit of the Spirit memorized in their minds? Just as long as they are engraved upon our hearts.

Today we concentrate on self-control. Self-control is love restraining. I am going to start with a presidential quiz. During his term as president he grew somewhat overweight. His wife said to him, “You can’t run the country if you can’t run yourself.” Taking her wisdom he lost 23 pounds. Who was it? Lyndon Johnson.

Who said this? “Undeniably, character does count for our nation, and this week we celebrate the importance of character in our lives. Core ethical values of trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, caring, respect, and citizenship form the

foundation of our democracy, our economy, and our society.” Bill Clinton 2 weeks before the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke out.

Who said, “With all the power that a President has, the most important thing to bear in mind is this: You must not give power to a man unless, above everything else, he has character.” Richard Nixon in 1964 – ten years before Watergate.

I am sure that the pressures of being the president could lend itself to some cases of lack of self-control. And yet, the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Self-control is a major struggle because love is trying to restrain human nature and it is a tough, on-going battle. We say “Yes” to some things that the Holy Spirit is telling us not to do and we say “No” to the very things the Holy Spirit is prodding us to do. I am just thinking out loud here, but I wonder how many conflicts we read about in the Bible or have experienced ourselves, that isn’t a matter of self-control.

Take Sarah and Abraham for a moment. They were promised a child, but both of them were getting on in years. So Sarah gets the idea that it is to be her slave, Hagar, that will birth the child. Their human side is saying, “Yes, yes, let’s do it this way.” While the Holy Spirit is trying to say, “No, no, wait on God.” In love, the Holy Spirit is trying to restrain their human worries for an heir. As a result, their lack of self-control led to many messy and difficult consequences. Just like it always does. So, self-control is an important fruit of the Spirit. What can we do to make it grow?

Listen again to these words from 2 Peter. “God’s divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness. For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with

godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.” Did you hear what he said? God has given you everything you need for life and godliness.

Peter also said, “for this reason make every effort....” God gives us what we need and we apply it. So here are some ways to apply self-control.

First, know the reasons God gave you this life. Since you want to develop self-control then you need to know your reason for life. You will develop self-control when you are focused on the goal God has set for all of us. When I was learning to ride a bicycle my father told me to look straight ahead at an object way in front of me. Don't look down and don't look around. I stared at something out on the horizon and set myself to reach that goal. And it worked. I stayed up on my bicycle. I went straight ahead and didn't wobble or fall. The same is true for all of us. God has set the goal to which we can aim for. 1) You are made to love God; we call that worship. 2) You are made to love people; we call that fellowship. 3) You are made to be like Jesus; we call that discipleship. 4) You are made to serve God; we call that ministry. And 5) you are made to tell people about God's love; we call that evangelism. When you know that, then you know your goal, your aim, and your reason for being. And then self-control will be growing within you.

The second thing you can do to grow self-control is practice, practice, practice. Paul said “All athletes practice strict self-control. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.” The prophet Haggai puts it this way, “Give careful thought to your ways.” Either one will do. The point is, you know your goal and purpose for life, now train for it. Now, practice it and hand your life over to the fruit of self-control.

Another clue to achieving self-control is having an eternal perspective. “We run for a prize that will not fade away,” wrote Paul, “but we do it for an eternal prize.” It is easier to gain self-control when one maintains an eternal perspective instead of focusing on the temporary or immediate. It is like dieting. Instead of concentrating on losing pounds, which can be temporary, concentrate on a healthy life-style, which is long-lasting. It makes it easier, too.

There are my suggestions for the fruit of the Spirit that is self-control. Keep God’s purpose for your life constantly before you; practice, practice, practice; and keep an eternal perspective. Let self-control grow in your life.

Alright, now allow me to do a summary. Love is the blossom; Joy is love rejoicing in all things; Patience is love enduring; Peace is love resting and trusting in the arms of God; Kindness is love serving; Goodness is love motivating us within; Faithfulness is love proving to yourself your faith is real; Gentleness is love touching in healing and restoration; and Self-control is love restraining our human nature so we can do God’s will.

In all of this, please remember one thing. You cannot do it yourself. The Holy Spirit works with you. It is, after all, not our fruit, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And with that thought goes one more just like it. You will be fruit producers only as you stay connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Only those branches connected to the vine will bear fruit.” Stay connected to Jesus and the fruit of the spirit, all nine of them, will grow and grow and grow. Amen.