

Greeting Redeemer family!

As we near the end of the Summer, we're also nearing the end of our series on the Fruit of the Spirit. This week we finish Paul's list with the fruit of self-control. As I reflected on this important discipline this week, I started to realize that maybe I've had it backwards for a very long time. It started with this quote from CS Lewis that a friend of mine forwarded to me earlier this week:

“Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose *both* first and second things. We never get, say, even the sensual pleasure of food at its best when we are being greedy.”

It reminded me of another familiar passage from Lewis, from his great essay “The Weight of Glory”:

“Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Those last words always ring in my ears when I read them: “We are far too easily pleased.”

What if self-control isn't just about restraint and saying “no” to things? What if, instead, it's all about freedom? A heart tempered under the control of the Holy Spirit runs head-long into the pleasures of God. Or, as John Piper adapts the Westminster Catechism: our great privilege as God's people is to “glorify God by enjoying Him forever.” Sin is too easy a substitute for the greater reward of knowing and praising God.

*I will give You all my worship
I will give You all my praise
You alone I long to worship
You alone are worthy of my praise!*

We open our service this week with a reading from Psalm 1. Here, the Psalmist extols the virtue of a life that is disciplined by the law of the Lord. It is our prayer as we enter worship this week that God would establish His Word in our hearts, so that our lives might leave a lasting and meaningful impact for His Kingdom in this world.

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.
Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

We follow this reading with singing songs of praise to the glory of our great God. The first song, “Holy is the Lord,” reminds us of the Biblical patterns of worship – raising our hands, bowing down in His presence, and echoing the song that the angels continually sing around the Throne:

*Holy is the Lord God Almighty
The earth is filled with His glory
Holy is the Lord God Almighty
The Earth is filled with His glory
The Earth is filled with His glory*

The last verse of “Our Great God” reminds us that the purpose of all creation is to reflect the glory and majesty of our Holy King. So we find our place in the created order as we worship the One who is the maker and sustainer of all.

*Let ev'ry creature in the sea and ev'ry flying bird
Let ev'ry mountain, ev'ry field and valley of the earth
Let all the moons and all the stars in all the universe
Sing praises to the living God who rules them by His Word*

*Hallelujah! Glory be to our great God!
Hallelujah! Glory be to our great God!*

Following the sermon, we will sing Chris Tomlin's update of the classic hymn “Amazing Grace.” As I thought about this week's theme of self-control, this chorus was the first thing that came to my mind:

*My chains are gone; I've been set free
My God my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood, His mercy rains
Unending love, amazing grace*

I love that declaration: that the chains of sin were broken by the grace of Christ, and now we are free to run hard into the immense joy and unending love of God. This is such an amazing promise and wonderful thing to celebrate. Yet the truth is that sometimes we choose to return to our chains. We grab at self-rule instead of allowing ourselves to be directed by the Holy Spirit. To paraphrase Lewis, we continually put “second things” before “first things.” Yet such is the amazing grace of Jesus that He remains a friend, even in our weakness. He will not leave us as slaves to sin, but will lead us to full liberation in His glorious Kingdom.

*Jesus! What a strength in weakness! Let me hide myself in Him.
Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing, He, my strength, my victory wins.
Hallelujah! What a Savior! Hallelujah! What a friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving, He is with me to the end.*

We close our service in the same way we began, singing of our God-given, grace-driven desire to glorify Him in everything we do. He alone is worthy of our worship and praise, so let us discipline ourselves to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

*I will give You all my worship
I will give You all my praise
You alone I long to worship
You alone are worthy of my praise*

Saved to worship freely,
Tim Sharpe
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