

# The Fruit of the Spirit Is Self-Control



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Judges 13–16; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1–10; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:15, 16.*

**Memory Text:** “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (*1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV*).

Though listed last by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23, “self-control” (sometimes translated “temperance”) is surely not the least of the fruit of the Spirit. It could easily have been first, because it plays a major role in the maturing of other spiritual fruit. It might be said that self-control is the glue that holds all the other qualities together.

Like other fruit of the Spirit, self-control is a gift of grace. It has been called “disciplined grace”: grace because it is free, disciplined because there is something for us to do.

Self-control may sound negative, but it is an integral part of grace itself. If we don't control ourselves—our feelings, our appetites, our drives—then they control us. Thus, it's either self-control under the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, or it's being controlled by someone or something else. We, ultimately, decide.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 6.*

## The Paradox of Self-Control (*Phil. 2:12, 13*)

Synonyms for *self-control* include *self-discipline*, *strength of mind*, and *willpower*. This fruit of the Spirit extends far beyond simply restraining Christians from doing what's prohibited but includes enabling us to do what's good.

**First** John 2:15, 16 admonishes us to stay away from three lusts. What are they, and, more important, how could they be manifested in our lives if we aren't careful?

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**Philippians** 4:8 lists items that should be the focuses of the Christian life. What are they, and how can doing what Paul says here protect us from the dangers listed in 1 John 2:15, 16?

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There are obviously dos and don'ts in the Christian life. There is a constant struggle with self, with the flesh, with the ways of the world. Paul shares this dilemma in Romans 7:15–18, when he talks about the struggle between what he knows he should do and what he's tempted to do. However, in Romans 8:1, he gives us the answer: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (*NKJV*).

He's talking about walking in the Spirit. A life without the Spirit is incapable on its own of developing the fruit of the Spirit. Though we have the will, Paul speaks for all of us when he says that we don't have the power. The answer to the dilemma of Romans 7 is not when can we overcome but how. And the how is found through faith in Jesus. We give ourselves to Jesus, we claim His righteousness, we are no longer condemned, and we surrender ourselves to Him and choose to walk in the Spirit, choose to follow His will, claiming His promises of victory. The key is holding onto the promises; here's where the power comes from. We cannot do it alone. We have to make the conscious choice to overcome in His name. The struggle is as much vertical (reaching up in faith) as it is horizontal (battling the clamors of the flesh). We need to do both.

## Joseph and the Immediate Results of Righteousness

Betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, Joseph had very good reasons to doubt the love and care (even the existence) of the God that he had been taught about since childhood. That's not, however, what he did.

**Read** Genesis 39:7–20. In these verses, where do we find the key to why Joseph acted as he did?

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**How** was Joseph “rewarded” for his refusal to yield to temptation? *Gen. 39:20*. He was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Is that what he gets for being faithful?

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This is an important point to remember. Can we expect that our determination to do what is right, no matter the cost, will mean that things will turn out OK for us in the short term? What about folk who have lost their jobs, their spouses, their families, indeed, even their lives because they refused to compromise with sin? We have examples of this in the Bible, and perhaps you know people who have gone through something similar. Or perhaps you have gone through it yourself. In the end, suppose Joseph had spent the rest of his life rotting in jail? Had he still done the right thing?

**“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (*Gal. 6:8, NKJV*). What is this text telling us? What is placed in contrast to what? What is at stake? Why, then, is the issue here of paramount importance? How does what Paul writes here help us to understand why, no matter the immediate results, Joseph did right?**

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## Samson and the Fruits of Failure

In Judges 13–16, the Bible gives us the story of Samson. Read through the texts (as much as time allows), keeping in mind the idea of self-control and temperance. There are plenty of powerful lessons we can learn from Samson’s example. How tragic that someone with so many gifts and so much promise could get so easily sidetracked.

“Samson in his peril had the same source of strength as had Joseph. He could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, he permitted the wild passions of his nature to have full sway. The reasoning powers were perverted, the morals corrupted. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility, honor, and usefulness; but he must first learn to govern by first learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was a free moral agent. Good and evil were before him. He could choose the path of purity, holiness, and honor, or the path of immorality and degradation. He chose the right way, and God approved. Samson, under similar temptations, which he had brought upon himself, gave loose rein to passion. The path which he entered upon he found to end in shame, disaster, and death. What a contrast to the history of Joseph!”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1007.

**Read** Judges 13:24, 25. Considering what we know about Samson, what important message, and warning, is found in those two texts?

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Despite his great promise, Samson allowed his passions and lusts to overcome everything good. Who hasn’t struggled with the reality of this conflict? The great controversy isn’t just a symbol; it depicts the battle between Christ and Satan that is waged, not simply as some cosmic conflict in the heavens but in every human being, as well. Though Christ paved the way for all people to share in His victory, the battle for our hearts and flesh is being fought, indeed, in our hearts and our flesh. Sure, Christ won it all for us. But we have to choose to claim His victory all the time and, by the choices we make, we are deciding for one side or another in the great controversy.

**How are you experiencing the reality of the great controversy in your own heart and flesh? What choices are you making? What do these choices tell you about which side you really are on?**

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## Paul's Long Race

**“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24–27, NKJV).**

Read prayerfully and carefully Paul's words here to the Corinthians. Notice how much in this he talks about himself and his struggles. We should find comfort in seeing that even a faithful Christian such as Paul, one of the true giants of faith, had to struggle with self, with sin, with the flesh. We are not alone in our battle. Heaven is going to be filled with people who knew the clamors of the flesh.

**Based** on the texts above, answer the following questions:

• What analogy does Paul use to help us understand the battle with self and sin that we all struggle with? What are the crucial differences, though, between the analogy and the reality he's referring to?

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• How confident was Paul regarding the race he was in? Where did his confidence come from? Why should we have the same confidence?

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• Though Paul shows confidence, he's also aware of the possibility of failure. How does he describe it, and what is his solution? How does his answer fit in with the theme this week?

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## How to Grow in Self-Control

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (*Heb. 12:1, NKJV*). Paul here again uses the race analogy that we saw earlier. What are some of the “weights” that you find are holding you back?

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**Read** Colossians 3:1–10. These verses give us rules for holy living as new persons in Christ. From these verses we learn several important things we must do to grow self-control in our lives. What do you find listed there, and how can you apply them to your own life and in a way that they will help get victory over the sin that so easily encumbers us?

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Every skill has to be practiced. Self-control doesn’t come in a day. It comes in hits and misses, in successes and failures, as we try to practice it day after day. “Fight the good fight of faith” (*1 Tim. 6:12, NKJV*); “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (*Phil. 3:12, NKJV*).

Don’t constantly put yourself in places where your weaknesses will be tested, where your most-difficult-to-control drives will be out on the firing line of temptation. We must avoid even the appearance of evil (*1 Thess. 5:22*). “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (*Rom. 13:14*).

**What are some areas of your life where self-control is definitely lacking? Why is it sometimes easier to get “victory” over dessert than to get victory over a spirit of bitterness and resentment? What changes can you make that will help you have more self-control?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Samson,” pp. 560–568, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The divine promise to Manoah was in due time fulfilled in the birth of a son, to whom the name of Samson was given. As the boy grew up it became evident that he possessed extraordinary physical strength. This was not, however, as Samson and his parents well knew, dependent upon his well-knit sinews, but upon his condition as a Nazarite, of which his unshorn hair was a symbol. Had Samson obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him. The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson’s affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, ‘She pleaseth me well.’ The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** G. Gordon Liddy was one of the infamous Watergate conspirators. Liddy ended up serving more jail time than anyone else in this scandal, which rocked the United States in the 1970s. One time, when trying to recruit a young woman for criminal activity, Liddy invited her to a restaurant. During the discussion, she asked how she could trust him; that is, suppose he were caught, how could she know that he would not turn her in? In order to prove to her his self-control, Liddy placed his finger over a lit candle at the table, and held it there long enough for his flesh to start burning before he removed it. His point was to show her just how much self-control he had. How does that kind of self-control compare with the fruit of the Spirit we have looked at this week? Can we find something noble and worth emulating in that kind of self-control? Are self-control and discipline always necessarily good?
- 2** In what ways might self-control become a means to fanaticism? How could we avoid the danger of making self-control a form of legalism?
- 3** Do you know someone who is suffering because of principle; that is, when tempted, they exhibited self-control like Joseph did and are now suffering some difficult consequences? How can you, either as a class or as an individual, help this person through his or her difficult time?

# My Brother's Prayer

by U. K. RAO

I live in a village on the eastern coast of India. As a teenager I got involved with a gang and began drinking. The gang was known for its violence and law breaking, but I stayed away from those activities.

My younger brother, Simon, isn't like me. He has a heart for God. Even though our village doesn't tolerate Christians, my younger brother became a Christian. This caused trouble in my family, and my parents sent him away.

One night I was at home drinking when Simon sneaked into the house. He came into my room and began praying. I remember saying, "Brother, pray for me." And he did. As he prayed for me, I felt the desire for alcohol leave my body. "What power is in you that when you pray to your God, I become sober?" I asked him.

"God has told me to pray for you," Simon answered. "His power will help you." He invited me to attend church with him, and I agreed to go. On Saturday morning I heard a voice so real that I turned to see who was talking. The voice said, "Go to the church." I started toward the church when I met some of the gang members and invited them to come with me. They laughed and made fun of Jesus. But I was determined to go.

My brother's prayers were changing me. Whenever I craved alcohol, that voice whispered, "Simon is praying for you; Jesus can deliver you." Soon I was alcohol free, and six months later I was baptized.

My conversion stirred up people in my village. Some wanted to learn about God, but others were furious. Non-Christians don't want Christians near them. They wouldn't let them draw water from the well or even breathe the same air. New believers were fined or forced to leave the village. I was warned not to talk about God or Jesus to other villagers.

Then the lay evangelist who was working with the new believers in our village suddenly died. The field president asked me to prepare to take his place. People who knew my background of drinking and gangs wondered at the change in me. I told them that the living God saved me and took away my desire to drink.

Because they saw the change in my life, some listened and began to worship with us. Now we have 50 people worshipping in a small room each Sabbath. These people want God's power in their lives. And my greatest joy is to lead them to Jesus.

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