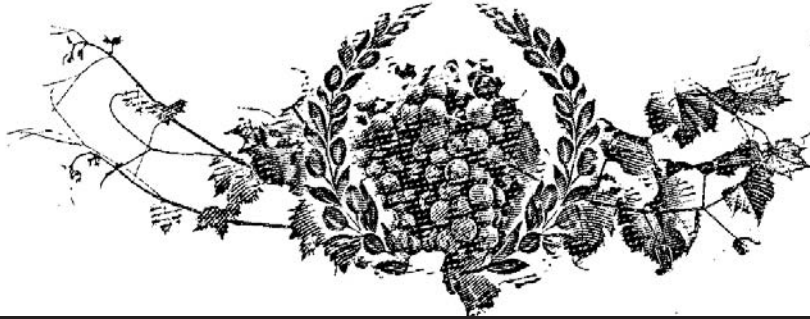


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Self-Control



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Judges 13–16; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1–10; Hebrews 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:15, 16.

MEMORY VERSE: “No, I train my body and bring it under control. Then after I have preached to others, I myself will not break the rules and fail to win the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:27, NlrV).

“**SELF-CONTROL**” (SOMETIMES TRANSLATED “**TEMPERANCE**”) is listed last on the list by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23. But this does not mean that self-control is the least important fruit of the Spirit. It easily could have been first because it plays an important part in making other spiritual fruit grow ripe. Self-control is the glue that holds all the other fruit together.

Like other fruit of the Spirit, self-control is a gift of grace.¹ It has been called “disciplined (trained) grace”: *grace* because it is free, *disciplined* because there is something for us to do.

Self-control may sound negative. But it is an important part of grace itself. When we fail to control ourselves—our feelings, our appetites, our drives—then they control us. So, we must choose self-control under the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Or we must accept being controlled by someone or something else. We are the ones who decide.

1. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 28**THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CONTROL (Philippians 2:12, 13)**

Self-control also means self-discipline (training), strength of mind, and willpower. This fruit of the Spirit is more than just limiting Christians to doing what is not permitted. But it also helps us to do what is good.

First John 2:15, 16 warns us to stay away from three lusts. What are they? More important, how could they be shown in our lives if we are not careful?

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

There are dos and do nots in the Christian life. There is a continuing struggle with self, with the flesh, and with the ways of the world. Paul shares this problem in Romans 7:15–18. He talks about the struggle between what he knows he should do and what he is tempted to do. But in Romans 8:1, 2, Paul gives us the answer: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus are no longer under God’s sentence [of death]. I am now controlled by the law of the Holy Spirit” (NIV).

Paul is talking about being under the Holy Spirit’s control. A life without

the Spirit cannot make the fruit of the Spirit grow. We have the will and the desire. But Paul speaks for all of us when he says that we do not have the power. The answer to the problem 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 (holy life). We are no longer under God’s sentence. And we surrender ourselves to Him and choose to walk in the Spirit. We choose to follow His will. And we claim His promises of victory. The important point is holding on to the promises. This is where the power comes from. We cannot do it alone. We have to make the personal choice to overcome sin in His name. The struggle is as much vertical—reaching up in faith—as it is horizontal—battling the temptations² of the flesh. We need to do both.



A life without the Spirit cannot make the fruit of the Spirit grow.

² temptations—things that can turn us away from God and that try to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

MONDAY—MARCH 1**JOSEPH AND THE SHORT-TERM RESULTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (Genesis 39:7–20)**

Joseph was betrayed by his own family and sold into slavery. He had very good reasons to doubt the love and care of God. He was taught about God's love since childhood. But Joseph did not forget God.

Where in Genesis 39:7–20 do we find why Joseph acted as he did?

How was Joseph “rewarded” for refusing to surrender³ to temptation? Genesis 39:20. Joseph was falsely charged and thrown into prison. Is that what he gets for being faithful?

This is an important point to remember. If we are firm in doing what is right, will it mean that things will turn out OK for us in this life? What about people who have lost their jobs, their spouses, their families, even their lives because they refused to compromise (give in) with sin? We have examples of this in the Bible. Perhaps you know people who have gone through almost the same experience. Or perhaps you have gone through it yourself. Suppose Joseph had spent the rest of his life rotting in jail? Would he still have done the right thing?

What is Galatians 6:8 telling us?

3. surrender—giving one's self completely.

How are the two groups of people different? What is placed in contrast to what? Why is it so important what we “plant”? How does what Paul writes here help us to understand why Joseph did right, no matter what the short-term results were?

TUESDAY—MARCH 2**SAMSON AND THE FRUITS OF FAILURE (Judges 13:24, 25)**

In Judges 13–16, the Bible gives us the story of Samson. Read through the verses about the idea of self-control and temperance. There are powerful lessons we can learn from Samson's example. How sad that someone with so many gifts and so much promise as Samson could go wrong.

“Samson had the same source of strength as Joseph had. Samson could choose the right or the wrong as he pleased. But instead of taking hold of the strength of God, Samson permitted the wild desires of his heart to have full control over him. Samson's sense of right and wrong was mixed up. God had called Samson to a position of great responsibility [duty], honor, and usefulness. But he must first learn to control himself by learning to obey the laws of God. Joseph was to make choices. He was faced with both good and evil. Joseph could choose the path of a pure life, holiness, and honor or

the path of evil. But he chose the right way, and God approved. Samson was under almost the same temptations, which he had brought upon himself. But he let his desires control him. The path that Samson chose led him to shame, disaster, and death. How different is Samson's life from Joseph's!"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 2, page 1007.



Joseph chose the path of honor.

What important message, and warning, are found in Judges 13:24, 25 about Samson?

Samson had great promise. But he let his desires overcome everything good. Who has not struggled with how real this problem is? The great controversy (war) is not just a symbol.⁴ It pictures the battle going on between Christ and Satan. It is not just a war in the heavens but in every

person too. Christ opened the way for all people to share in His victory (win). But the battle for our hearts and flesh is going on in our hearts and in our flesh. Sure, Christ won it all for us. But we have to choose to claim His victory all the time. By the choices we make, we are deciding for one side or another in the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan).

How are you experiencing 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?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 3

PAUL'S LONG RACE (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

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

Based on 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, answer the following questions:

- **What comparison⁵ does Paul**

4. symbol—an object, mark, sign, or person that stands for, or means the same thing as, another object, idea, or thing.

5. comparison—the act of showing how two things are the same.

use to help us understand the battle with self and sin that we all struggle with? What are the important differences between the symbol and the thing that Paul is talking about?

- How confident was Paul about the race he was in? Where did his confidence (faith) come from? Why should we have the same confidence?

- Paul shows confidence (faith). But he also knows failure is possible. How does Paul describe it? And what is his answer? How does his answer fit in with the theme (topic) this week?

THURSDAY—MARCH 4

HOW TO GROW IN SELF-CONTROL (Hebrews 12:1)

Paul here again uses the race comparison we studied earlier. What are some of the “weights” that you find are holding you back?

Colossians 3:1–10 gives us rules for holy living as new persons in



What are the “weights” that hold you back from God?

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? How can you use them in your own life? How can we use them to help us get victory over the sin that so easily burdens us?

Every skill has to be practiced. Self-control does not 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 Timothy 6:12, NKJV); “I have not yet received all of those things. I have not yet been made perfect. But I move on to take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of me for” (Philippians 3:12, NIV).



Put on the Lord Jesus Christ as your clothing.

Do not keep putting yourself in places where your weaknesses will be tested. These are the places where it is difficult to control our desires under the firing line of temptation. We must avoid anything that seems to be evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). “Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ as your clothing. Don’t [Do not] think about how to satisfy what your sinful nature wants” (Romans 13:14, NIV).

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

FRIDAY—MARCH 5

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Samson,” pages 560–568, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.⁶

“God’s promise to Manoah was later fulfilled in the birth of a son named Samson. As the boy grew up, it became clear that he had great physical strength. But this was not dependent upon Samson’s well-developed muscles but upon his condition as a Nazirite.⁷ Samson’s uncut hair was a symbol of his vow as a Nazirite. If Samson had obeyed God’s commands as faithfully as his parents had done, he would have had a more noble and happier future. But Samson’s fellowship with idolators⁸ caused him to go astray. Samson’s town of Zorah was near the country of the Philistines, so Samson became friendly with them. In Samson’s youth, he learned to love many women who darkened his whole life. A young

woman living in the Philistine town of Timnath got Samson interested in her. So Samson decided to make her his wife. Samson’s God-fearing parents tried to discourage him from his purpose. But his only answer was ‘She pleases me well.’ The parents at last surrendered⁹ to his wishes, and the marriage took place.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 562.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① G. Gordon Liddy was involved in the infamous Watergate¹⁰ mess which shocked the United States in the 1970s. Liddy ended up serving more jail time than anyone else. One time, he was trying to encourage a young woman into some kind of crime. Liddy invited her to a restaurant. During the discussion, the woman asked how she could trust him. Suppose he were caught, how could she know that he would not tell on her? Liddy tried to prove to her his self-control. He put his finger over a lit candle at the table. Then he held it there long enough for his flesh to start burning before he removed it. Liddy tried to show her just how much self-control he had. How does that kind of self-control compare¹¹ with the fruit of the Spirit

6. *Patriarchs and Prophets*—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women who are given messages by God to give to His people.

7. Nazirite—a person who made a vow to never drink alcohol; an Israelite with a very special, holy relationship with God.

8. idolators—people who worship false gods.

9. surrendered—gave in.

10. Watergate—an office and apartment building in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., where a political scandal took place in 1973.

11. compare—to show how two or more things are the same.

we have studied this week? Can we find something noble and of value in showing almost the same kind of self-control? Are self-control and discipline¹² always necessary and good?

② In what ways might self-control show we might be going too far? How could we avoid the danger of making

self-control a form of legalism?¹³

③ Do you know someone who is suffering because of following principle (the law)? For example, he or she showed self-control like Joseph and now is suffering some hardships. If so, how can you help this person through his or her difficult time?

12. discipline—training that makes you a stronger and better person.

13. legalism—the practice of believing that one can earn salvation (the act of being saved) by obeying the law.