



Summer Fruit-Part 9

Self-Control

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I had a dog when I was a kid that was crazy. I mean, I think he was literally crazy. This dog ran around the yard like a maniac, savagely chewed things up, barked like a four-legged lunatic. He was a crazy dog. I tried at some points to try to get him to sit and stay and roll over and those kinds of things but I never got very far with that dog. I'm okay to admit that it's because I didn't persist in working very hard with the dog. There was always that kid at school who had the dog that was completely trained and could sit and stay and walk calmly beside him. All of that was a bit of a rebuke to my life because I realized that I could probably do better if I just worked a little harder with this dog, you know? But that guy was the guy who would, speaking of barking, he would bark out commands in German at his dog, you know, and I could imagine this guy taking a pack of dogs and walking 15 dogs at one time. He's kind of like the dog whisperer. I'm sure he could have all of them walking just calmly. And, you know, things could happen around him and those dogs would just keep on going. I can see all of that.

Which, by the way, is not a bad way for you to view the options in your Christian life. Matter of fact, that's not a bad way to view your Christian life. I'd like you to view your Christian life as you being that human being with 5, 10, 15 leashes, let's put it that way, and 15 dogs of all kinds. And it is your job to hold those leashes and to train those dogs to walk down this path of righteousness, as it says in Psalm 119, to walk in the way of his commands. You've got these dogs and that makes it a challenge. But you've got an advantage. You've got the human brain and the dogs have the dog brains. So you would hope that with some work and some discipline, you could get those dogs to walk that path and you could make progress in the right time, in the right sequence without taking any left turns. If it's not time, you could walk by endless fire hydrants and they would never stop and there could be rabbits across the road and they're not going to go after them, you are going to be in charge of these dogs.

That is the picture of the battle between what we've seen in Galatians 5, between the flesh that surrounds us and what we're encased in, we're enmeshed in it, and our spirit. Our spirit that the Bible teaches is made new, that we have a new heart the Bible would teach us in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the promise of looking forward to the New Testament age was that we would have a new heart and that God would in that relationship with us, so transform us, as Paul said, that we'd be a new creation, that old things would pass away. In particular, as Paul unpacks this to the Romans, our flesh would respond differently to the desires and impulses and appetites that it has because you would learn to reign those things in. As a matter of fact, that's a passage we should start with as we wrap up our series on the Fruit of the Spirit, the last one in this list. We've covered love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. Now, here's the last one, the last one that really ties them all together because you're not going to see any of those in your life without this last one. The last one is self-control. And I want to show you that it's the relationship between you who is supposed to be the master of the things that surround you, that have a brain of their own. Right? The impulses of our humanity, our fallen flesh. But you're supposed to get those things in control. And you were supposed to be the master here of these impulses.



Take a look at it with me in Romans Chapter 6. Grab this in your Bibles. Look it up on your devices. Make sure you get your eyeballs on this text of Scripture in Romans Chapter 6. I want you to look at verses 12 and 13. The problem is our flesh, sometimes referred to as our body. We're not just talking about our eyelashes and our fingernails and our kneecaps. We're not just talking about the biology of it. We're talking about the problem of what happened in the fall in Genesis 3.

Let's go back just before we read this. Remember what happened in Genesis Chapter 2? It is an explanation of what is described in summary in Chapter 1. Chapter 1, God creates Adam and Eve. Chapter 2, he starts to give detail as to how that worked. He says this, that God created Adam out of the dust of the ground, the dirt. The biology that you find in the planet that God made, the periodic table, he creates from that, as a designer, this designed, organized body. That is made from the ground. And then he animates it by giving it a spirit. He says "he breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul." So he's a living soul. That's the word we use, like a captain would if a boat goes down. You know how many souls on board, Captain? You would say? Well, 220. There's a number of all the people. Now, the people are defined as people who are in bodies and they have a spirit. That's the word "breath" in Hebrew and in Greek in the New Testament. It's translated both ways. There is an immaterial part, I like to call it your software, and then there's the material part, the hardware. That's the description in Genesis Chapter 2.

In Genesis 3, you remember, they rebelled against God. God said, "Don't eat from the tree." They ate from the tree. Then God comes and gives the consequences. Part of the consequences is that the dirt, the dust of the ground, the periodic table, everything in biology and physics and geology and everything else, weather systems, he says this: "Cursed is the ground because of you." So the elements that I've created and everything in the order of what I've made and in all of the scope of what I've made, all of that's going to be messed up because of you.

Now, here's the problem. The dust of the ground is what you're made of. So you're going to be messed up and it's going to be, to whatever extent the complexities or the capacities of those things that are based in biology, all of that is going to be skewed. Just like weather patterns now are going to bring destruction. Just like we're going to have issues out there in the animal kingdom or in the world that are going to be messed up. In your body, it's going to be messed up. One of the problems is it is going to express things in terms of appetites and desires that I don't want you to do. I'm going to make it hard. I'm going to mess up even your relationships. He talks about marriage there in that passage. There are going to be impulses and desires and it's going to mess this all up. And that is a just consequence to what you've done here.

As a matter of fact, he goes on to say in that passage, you were made from the dust of the ground and into dust you're going to return. I'm going to take your spirit from your body, and that's called death when those two separate, and we're going to have a whole new creation. Matter of fact, we're going to start over, we're going to bar you from the Tree of Life. We're going to have a whole another thing coming down in redemption and the story of redemption unfolds from Genesis Chapter 3 on.

But here's the problem. The body that we're in is unredeemed until we get out of this life and get this next body. So it's always going to be a problem even after God puts in our hearts a new heart, the heart of stone gets changed to a heart of flesh. We now have the impulses and desires at the core of our being, I like to say, that now want to please God. The problem is everything in our flesh, anything in our body, our fallenness, our humanity, our appetites and impulses and desires and proclivities and patterns and habits of our lives, all of those are all still messed up. And so in Romans 8, we get to the crescendo of his story and he says we can't wait for the redemption of the body. That'll be great when everything's the way it is supposed to be. In the meantime, we've got a battle.

Chapter 6, Romans Chapter 6 verse 12, "Do not let sin," we know what that is, the rebellion, we don't want that to happen, "reign," look at this, the avenue, "in your mortal bodies," your fallen bodies. We going to have a resurrected glorified body. But until then, you've got this mortal body, this fallen body, "to make you obey its passions." Now, you know why this illustration that I'm trying to get in your mind clearly for this week in your Christian life is you're surrounded by 15 dogs walking those 15 dogs and you've got this thing you live in. You're in the middle of it. You've got this redeemed brain. You've got dog brains all around you and all they want to do is what they want to do. And you don't have them, right? You don't have them there as the boss. You don't obey them. You're supposed to make them obey you. Don't let them be in charge. Right?

It says in verse 13, "Don't present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness." There are things they could do, they could bite the ladies, you know, ankle here as were walking by the cafe. They can, you know, they can go dig a hole in someone's front lawn. Don't let them do that. Don't let them be instruments of things that I've told you you shouldn't do. Instead, "present yourselves to God" as a living sacrifice he's going to say in Chapter 12, your whole person. You're going to say, okay, God, I want to serve you "as those who have been brought from death to life." I was dead. The interior core desires of my heart were not what they were supposed to be. But now I am a Christian. Now, I have desires to please God, and therefore I got a battle going on in the members of my body. "And your members," the parts of your body, "present them to God also as instruments of righteousness."

Well, that isn't going to be easy. That's like telling me with my maniac dog running around the yard and chewing up everything he sees to say, okay, I've got to make sure he gets under control. And I don't just have one dog in my life. I want you to picture 15 dogs surrounded there, fanned out all around me. And I'm walking through life and God says, get from here to there and don't chew up, you know, the lady's purse. Don't bite the guy's ankle. Don't dig holes in the yard here. You walk on this path and you keep those dogs in check as you walk from here to there. You're the master. They are going to be your slaves. You make that clear in the arrangement you have with your own flesh when we get from here to there.

Now, when I use the phrase self-control, the Fruit of the Spirit is, number 9, self-control. A sermon like that is hard to preach because I've got a problem in addressing a group that I have varied people in and I'm not sure where you stand. There's an old adage about preaching that you're supposed to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Have you heard that before? And that's the problem when you talk about things like self-control, because some of you say,



"Got it. Done. I'm all about it." If I were to ask you, for instance, this morning as you drove into the parking lot, I knocked on your window when you got into the parking space and I said, "Hey, I want to talk to you about the sins you've committed this morning, yesterday, last night, Friday. Talk to me about your sin this week." I know some people and I've met them at church who've said to me, "I don't sin anymore." I had a guy literally say that to me. He was probably 60, 70-years-old, said, "I don't sin anymore. I used to sin when I was young back in college. I don't sin anymore."

OK, well, lying is clearly a sin of yours, I can point out at this juncture, but he doesn't see the problem. So what I need to do in his life, if I'm preaching about self-control, is I need to afflict the comfortable. He's very comfortable in his sanctification. I need to say, wait a minute, you got a problem. Then I've got another group of people who come in. I say self-control. It's much like a sermon about prayer. You go, "Well, I don't pray like I should." And so you feel the guilt. And I'm really here to try and comfort you, because the whole point of us moving into a greater level of self-control in your life is not living in the defeat of your past and sensing that you just can't do this. "I can't do this. I can't do this. I'm a failure. I keep stumbling and falling. And I just... I can't, I can't do it." So I've got to try to do both.

So let me do that real quick. Let's start with James Chapters 3, turn to James Chapter 3 and when we're talking about this battle that we're going to face. And if you're taking notes, let's start with that heading and then we'll unpack this, OK? And I know this is a textual topical sermon, and I apologize for that. We're going to get back to verse by verse, consecutive texts and unpacking and expositing those. But in our last installment of this series, I want you to indulge me in this. Looking at these passages, trying to logically homiletically put together something that will be helpful for you in your spiritual life.

The first thing I'd like you to put as a heading here this morning, number one, is I want you to re-engage in the battle, "Re-engage In the Battle." There is a battle between you taking the pack of dogs through this week. You've got seven days till we get back here together, Lord willing, and I want you to walk through this path from here to next week to where you've kept that pack of dogs called your flesh in control. And so, first of all, to re-engage in the battle, I need you to know there is a battle. And maybe the helpful thing is to remember that if you think there wasn't a battle, we need to look back and see all the holes that were dug and all the purses that were chewed up and all the mailmen who were bitten. I want you to recognize we've got a problem. So we're going to start with one member of your pack. OK. And that one, I know it's a little Chihuahua and it's just vicious. I don't care what you think about the control of your life. All of us should be, if you're comfortable in your sanctification, you should be afflicted right now by thinking clearly about this.

So, James Chapter 3 verse 2. Let's look at this. Get your eyeballs on this passage with me, please, and let's understand what the Bible has to say about our lives. Number 2. Verse 2. James 3:2. "We all stumble in many ways." That would have been a good verse to quote to my elderly friend who says, "Hey, I haven't sinned." No, we all stumble, stumble is the analogy of falling into sin. We've fallen and all of us fall into sin in many ways. It would be good for you to recognize that this morning. That's the first step in fixing the problem of our sanctification. "And if anyone does not

stumble," and now he picks one of the dogs in the pack, "in what he says, then he's a perfect man." Now, I hope even if I said to this guy, "Hey, are you a perfect man?" I hope he would say, "No, I'm not a perfect man." Well, OK, you're not a perfect man. Let's make that super clear. Right? First John Chapter 1, "If you say you're without sin, you're lying and the truth is not in you." So you are a sinner, I am a sinner, and we have problems. We have problems, really, if we're going to talk about sin, in my managing the "dogs" of my flesh. I have a problem with that and you have a problem with that and he says, let's just talk about that one little dog there that causes so much trouble.

Drop down to verse 5. He talks about how a small thing can make a big damage. That's the intervening verses here. Now verse 5 is, "So also the tongue is a small member," it's a small part of your body, "but it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!" This thing can lash out like a dragon and it can hit things and light them on fire, and the words that you have can have these huge domino effects and consequences. Like this gal I read about in South Dakota, who lit a cigarette, threw her match on the ground, started a fire. It was one of the biggest in South Dakota history, she was brought to court, she was charged and convicted of arson and she was ordered to pay 42-million-dollars in restitution, all for just tossing a match on the ground carelessly and she lit this thing up.

OK, our words. If you think about the problem, some of the biggest issues in your past, a lot of them start with what comes out of your mouth. It comes out of your mouth in the heat of the moment, in an argument, in frustration, in gossip, in lying or deception or whatever it is, some small thing. It just comes so easily out of your mouth. And you've got to look at that and look how it describes this member, this one little dog in your pack. He's a small dog but he causes big trouble. Verse 6, "The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteous." And among the things that this little dog can do, "The tongue is set among our members and it's staining the whole body." I mean, it really causes problems just in the other parts of our lives, our appetites. "Setting on fire the entire course of life." And then I just need you to know this. Here's one of the problems with our flesh, "and it is set on fire by hell." There's a spiritual battle that goes on in that sermon. But I want you to think about the way Satan loves to capitalize on our fallen impulses. He's always trying to whip those dogs into a fury. There's this one dog, your tongue, that instrument within your mouth that is used for sinful purposes all the time. God says you need to get serious about that and know that that's the problem and recognize that. It goes on to talk about all kinds of beast are tame, but you can't seem to tame this. We could go further but I hope all of us are going to sit here this morning and say, you're right. I'm a sinner. Great.

Now, the other side of this, and I can quote a passage here because you already know it. First John 1:8 and 9. Once you recognize that there are issues of self-control and maybe you're dealing with some things, pornography, or it maybe has to do with your gluttony, or maybe it has to do with whatever, your outburst of anger, and you know you have it. And if not, we tried to show you just at least think about your words. Clearly, we have sin problems. You cannot control yourself the way that you know, as a Christian, you want to, your heart desires to.

So once you have that, here's the first step in us getting this right. It's called confession. Confession. It's a great Greek word. It's a compound word, which means I'm agreeing with God



and we are agreeing that it's a problem. And most of us don't do that as much as we ought to just stop and say, okay, God, what I just did was wrong. I agree with you that it's wrong. Here's how the verse goes and you know it, "If you confess your sins," and here's the good news, "he is faithful," every time. All the time. Always consistently. This week, next week, 10 years from now. "He is faithful and righteous," or just. In other words he has the mechanism in place to solve the problem. You no longer are going to be guilty because of the cross of Christ, the plan of redemption started in Genesis 3. God knows exactly how to solve your sin problem judicially. In other words, that 42-million-dollar debt can be forgiven.

Whatever sin has been caused by your lack of self-control, here it is, "he's faithful and just to," here it is, a great word "Aphiemi," "to forgive your sins." All that is released in a moment, as it says in Colossians 2:14, "the debt against you that was hostile toward you is completely canceled." "To forgive your sins." And to, here's a good word too, just compounding the image, "and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." You see a hillside that was burned by fire and you think that's a mess. I want it to be green again. Well, there may be consequences to you flipping matches or having your dogs bite the mailman. I understand there are going to be lasting consequences. But here's the good thing: between you and God, you being responsible for walking that pack of dogs from Sunday to Sunday, you can be completely exonerated before God, forgiven. God can look at you as though you didn't have those problems and you need to confess it. The Bible's very clear, you have to simply be clear and honest and sincere in your agreement with God that you've done wrong.

So I want us to get into a discussion about self-control by starting by leveling the playing field for all of us. You've sinned. I've sinned. Self-control is a problem. We all need to admit it before God. And right now, honestly and sincerely, agree with God. "God, you're right. I can identify this. I can identify that. I can see these things. And I just want to confess it," and start fresh. To quote Isaiah 1, as "though your sins are like scarlet, they'll be white as snow." Bam! Fresh slate. So you and I sit here this morning and we can say, okay, God, regardless of how bad it's been, as it says in Proverbs, "a righteous man can stumble seven times." That's a number to show that you that it's feels like it's complete every week and yet he rises again.

I want you to get up right now in your heart, in your mind and don't say, "Well, I can have no self-control because I don't have any self-control. I can see it. Talk about affliction. I've been afflicted by my sin. I walk in feeling like a defeated Christian." Then I'm going to say to you, "Hey, get up." Because God is going to, right now, if you sincerely confess your sins, unless he's a liar and I don't think you want to call him that, he wipes away your sin. He forgives you, aphiemi, he lets it go, it's done between you and God. There may be some lawns you got to go back and pay for, but here's the deal, you are right with God. Now we can move forward. To re-engage in the battle, I think you start that way.

And once we confess, there's another component to this and maybe we should think in these terms, as long as we're going to call it a fight and a battle. You need to repent. To confess it is to agree with God that it's wrong. Now, here's another biblical word. We "repent," which means we're resolving and turning to say, "I had the dogs of my life chew on a few people's ankles this week. It is time for me to resolve to not let that happen this week. I'm going to resolve to say, God,



I'm turning from what I did and I am now going to exercise self-control. I'm going to re-engage the battle." First Peter Chapter 1 says It is a battle that wages war. "The flesh is waging war against the soul."

Here's another passage for you, Hebrews Chapter 12, just to have you write it down. In Hebrews Chapter 12, to give you the exact verse, if I can find it, verses 4 through 6. Here is this section of Scripture, and he reminds us, I'll just quote it for you, when he's talking to people that he looks at their sanctification, he's about to talk about discipline and he says this, "In your struggle against sin," you've struggled with this pack of dogs, he says, "you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." In other words, OK, tough guys and gals walking this pack of dogs. "I've tried, I've tried to make him sit. I've tried to make him heal. I tried not to get him to bite anybody." He goes, I don't think you've tried as hard as you can and should try, to re-engage in the battle, confession, repentance, and repentance is OK.

Next week, I'm going to deal with this self-control thing differently to the point of saying the no holds barred, I am completely ready to go as far as I can go. Some of us don't want calluses on our hands because we're pulling the leashes back. "Ohhh, it hurts! I don't know. I just can't control the Chihuahua." Listen, you have all these dogs on a leash. You are tied to your body and its appetites and desires and impulses. And all I'm saying is get ready to have some bloody calluses on your hands and say, "I'm going for blood this week. I'm going to fight. I'm going to..." here are the words of Paul when he speaks to the Colossians in Colossians Chapter 3, he says, "Put to death whatever is earthly in you." Put it to death.

Are you ready to fight to the death between you and your pack of dogs called your flesh? Now you've got to have them in this life. You've got to have this body. Right? We're not getting rid of... we're not going to commit mass suicide. We're going to walk from this Sunday, Lord willing, to next Sunday. We've got to control these. But I'm ready to have some bloody calloused hands as I fight the dogs in my life.

And we're going to get some strategies from Scripture, but I'm ready to fight. You re-engage the battle to say, "In my struggle against sin, I have struggled, I have, my arms are sore, but I really haven't yet resisted to the point of shedding blood." That's what I call re-engaging in the battle. I don't care where you're at, whether it's pornography, whether it's gluttony, whether it's some issue in your life that you don't even want to speak of publicly and you are failing in your self-control. I'm saying today is the day for you to start fresh, clean slate, confession, repentance, and now a resolve to do what you have to do, even if it costs you more this week than it's ever cost you to say I'm going to fight this thing, I'm going to re-engage in the battle. That's the first step.

The second step is understanding what the goal is. So let me give you the second point. Number two, and then we'll unpack it. The goal in this is to get the physical, number two, "Get the Physical To Yield To the Spiritual," get the physical to yield to the spiritual. Get the physical of my life, my flesh, to yield to the spiritual. The software is going to control this and the problem is the motherboard has all these chips soldered to it with firmware on it and I know it's got dog brains down there all around me, but I'm going to have the human brain that has been renewed in Christ, I'm going to have that dominate. And as Peter, James and John learned when they went to

go pray with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, remember that passage? He says, "Come pray with me," and they fell asleep. Jesus gives us that line that I hope you all can identify with, he says this. He says, "The spirit is willing." Hey, Peter, James, I know you want to pray with me for an hour, he says, "but the flesh is weak."

And as he's saying, "Oh, so I guess you can't pray for an hour." That's not what he says. He chides them for it, he rebukes them for it. "You couldn't watch and pray with me for an hour?" And even he gives us the battle, he says, because their, and it's an interesting Greek idiom, "their eyelids were heavy." Right? It's like they had weights on their eyelids. I understand you're tired and I understand it's hard to stay awake when you don't want to stay awake. And your body is saying "bed, sleep, pillow, snoring, dreams. I want to sleep." And he says, no, it's time to pray. You're going to have to fight your physical impulses to do what you know the Spirit says you ought to do. The whole goal of sanctification, whether it's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, whatever it is, is to have the spiritual dominate the physical.

Turn with me to First Corinthians Chapter 9. First Corinthians Chapter 9. I want to get your eyes looking at this text. And I have to have you understand and I love our English Standard Version, but no translation is perfect, and I'm just going to tell you, I don't mean to undermine your integrity in the English Standard Version, it's a good translation. But in this passage they had a stark, stark phrase that would just really get us to go, "Whoa!" and they put sunglasses on it so it, you know, it kind of mellowed it out. But I got to have you see what the footnote says in this passage, because it says it so well that it's the militant mindset you need if my flesh, my physical, is going to submit to the spirit that God has made me to be. More on that in a minute. I know that may sound like it's a half, you know, heresy to you, but I'll get to solving that in complete orthodoxy in just a minute.

First Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 24. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run?" Well, of course, yeah. "But only one receives the prize." In other words, there are a lot of people who aren't going to get across the finish line and get the wreath, and he's writing to the Corinthians. They had their own version of the Olympic Games and they had platforms and they put on the laurel wreath around their head and they got the applause, and everyone thought you're a great athlete. He says, yes, "We want to run to obtain the prize." Right? This is not a physical prize, obviously, but the eternal prize of God saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Here are the rewards. Enter into your rest." We want to have God's approval on living the Christian life with gold, silver, precious stones, not just wood, hay and straw.

And he says this, "Every athlete exercises," here's our word, "self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable." Ours is so much more important. "So I do not run aimlessly." I'm not just running around, you know, in my training. No. And "I don't box as when beating the air," like "swish, swish, swish." No, no. I'm not shadowboxing. No, no. "I discipline my body, and," here the phrase I want you to underscore, "keep it under control." Do you see that? Do you see a number two next to it if you have an English Standard Version, a footnote? Go to that footnote, would you? Take a look at that, find that or hover over it on your tablet. You see it says Greek, and then it has an italicized phrase here. Here's the literal rendering of this phrase. "I pummel my body and make it my slave." OK? Now, that's pretty serious, right?



And I understand why you'd want to put sunglasses on that phrase and kind of dampen the sharp, you know, BAM! of that phrase. I get it. Because there is an entire season of church history that fell into something we call asceticism. It is warned against in the book of Colossians, and that is inflicting pain on myself and thinking the act of putting pain on myself is somehow a godly action. And it's not, that's not the point. Matter of fact, he's made clear it's about getting the prize. It's about obedience. It's about self-control. So I understand why you might put some sunglasses on that. But I'm thinking Compass Bible Church can take it. Right?

So we're going to look at that passage and we're going to say, what is he saying? We're going to get this analogy that he's using and understand this. Hey, you are going to take your body and teach your body who's in charge. The body and its impulses in the fallen humanity of it, I'm going to say, wait a minute, my spirit is calling the shots here. I am making you my slave. I mean we don't even talk that way about dogs anymore, let alone your own body. But the idea of that dog pack that you're walking through life with, you need to say, "Wait a minute. Call me master. I'm the master. I have the human brain here. You have the dog brains. You're going to listen to me. You dogs are my slave." Right? That the idea. He says "I pummel my body." Some translations say, "I buffet my body." I'm ready to tell my body and teach my body every day who is in charge. This is not just so that you can get chiseled at the gym. This is not just about exercise here. This is about the fact that I know my body is going to want some things and the things that it wants are not going to be godly. And those instruments that are so used to doing unrighteous things, those members of my body, I'm going to teach my body that it has to obey my spirit and my spirit, being renewed, wants to please God. So, I'm going to make sure my body knows the physical has to yield to the spiritual. I have to have that perspective. It needs to become my slave.

As long as we're nearby, go to First Corinthians Chapter 6. Here's the problem. There are things you're going to have to do beyond what you have to avoid. You're going to have to teach your body and its impulses to be subjected as slaves to the disposition and the volitional choices of your spirit. You're going to do that training sometimes with things that would be lawful to do. You can do it, but you're going to change the rules on your life so that when push comes to shove and the rabbit runs across the trail, your dogs, your flesh, they're going to stay right there focused on the path. It's like those YouTube videos where they put, like the sausage on the nose of the dog and he sits there until the master says, OK. And then he, you know, he eats it. You've seen those. Right?

So how can you sit there with that temptation and say, I am going to make it...? Well, sometimes you have to say, well, this is something I could do, it's lawful for me to do, but I'm not going to do it because I know if I do it, I'm just going to teach my flesh that it's in charge. I going to teach my physical impulses that they get whatever they want. And I don't want to do that. He quotes the saying that was going around here in Corinth. Look at verse 12. "All things are lawful for me." This is First Corinthians 6:12. Are you with me here? "All things are lawful for me." Paul says, well, let me respond to that. "Not all things are helpful." There are some things I know you could do. They're not disallowed in Scripture. They're not prohibited in Scripture, but wouldn't be good for your spiritual life. He says, "All things are lawful for me." He quotes that again. But he says, here's his insight, "I will not be dominated by anything."



There are things that I could do and they're not going to be helpful because, as he's taught so often in his epistles, I can become enslaved to those instruments and appetites and impulses of my fallenness, and I'm not going to do that. Therefore, as he says later in the book, "I will, pummel my body and make it my slave." I will teach my flesh who is in charge. That's the strength of the Christian life that God wants to grant you. You have to make this your mindset that the physical yields to the spiritual. And that's going to happen by you saying even if something is allowable, you're not going to do it.

Now that you take your mind, if you know the Bible, into the realm and the category of something the Bible calls fasting. You're familiar with that, right? Abstaining from food. Food that, by the way, God created that you could eat and enjoy and it would nourish your body. Food. Food is just a daily impulse. We want it. I mean, if you're me, you want to eat it every 30 minutes. Right? I need another meal. That is our impulse of our body. The Bible introduces us to this concept of saying no to those impulses. Is it good for us to eat breakfast? Well, sure it's good for us to have breakfast. Is it good for us to have lunch? Yeah, it's good. How about a mid-afternoon snack? Well, sure, that would be fine. How about dinner? You should eat dinner tonight. That's a good thing. But here's something in the Bible now introduced called fasting, where people have those impulses and they say, I know it's a good thing, it's lawful for me to eat lunch, but I am going too fast.

Now, God required that on one day of the Jewish calendar. Do you know what day that was? Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur. That's translated "Yom" is "day," "Kippur" is "atonement. The Day of Atonement. It was the one day in the fall calendar where Israel was supposed to fast. They had to afflict themselves. So you have to purposely, voluntarily put yourself through pain, the pain of not eating. It was a fast day. The rest of the Bible helps explain that phrase, afflict yourself on that day. And what was that day all about? It was all about sin and remembering the price of sin and the animal that was slain by not just the priests, not the daily sacraments, but the high priest. The highest-ranking priest would kill this goat and the animal would die. And here would be this bloody sacrifice and that blood would be sprinkled on the sacred places in the temple. And then that other goat, he would lay his hand on that and it was called the scapegoat. And it would be let out into the wilderness and let go to go away. Here was the picture, the death and the substitution of innocent life for guilty people and their sin being carried away like Psalm 103 says, metaphorically, "as far as the east is from the west." It's removed from me.

So the picture is, man, we're sinners. We deserve death. God is going to be gracious. He's going to provide a substitute and my sin can be relieved from me. And then he says, everyone, when you're thinking about that, the atonement that God provides, I need you to fast. I want you to say no to your physical impulses. What connection would there be to that? Well, because the sin that causes the need of a holy God to have a substitutionary atonement is the fact that we can't control the pack of dogs that I live in called my flesh. So can you on that day at least, and there are other days that they got into the habit and tradition and personally, people chose to do it, but can you deny yourself something that's lawful so that you make sure you're not dominated by anything? That's the idea. Make sure your physical submits to your spiritual and in that sense, you exercise



your volition. As my old pastor used to say and you deny yourself something good. And you say that's a good thing, a lawful thing, but I'm saying no to it.

Maybe some of you haven't even engaged in fasting. There's a kind of fasting you don't even think about. It's a fasting in the Bible that's a reaction to a crisis or to trauma. I mean, it's happened in your life, I'm sure, where you've missed a meal or two meals or three meals because you're in the middle of the most traumatic day you've had in months or years and, I mean, if you ate, you'd throw up. Well, that is the kind of fasting and the Bible calls that fasting, but that's a reactionary fast. It's the purposeful volitional fast when I wake up, my stomach is grumbling for breakfast and I said, "Oh, no, it's a fast day. I'm not going to eat." And then it's lunchtime. Now I'm getting a headache and I want to eat. But no, I'm not going to eat. Then in the afternoon, I want to have like three meals to make up for the day. And it's like, no, I'm not going to have anything to snack on. And then it's evening and it's like, no, I'm just dying. Now, I got a massive headache and you say, I'm not going to eat. You deny yourself those things in one reason just to make sure the dogs know who's in charge and you're going to say no. Should you feed your dog? Yes, you should feed your dog. But there are times you say, I'm going to deny myself these things.

Even in marriage. I mean, think about First Corinthians Chapter 7, sexual relationships in a marriage. And it says even that there should be times of fasting where you say, no, we're going to commit ourselves to prayer. Saying no to things that are lawful so that you can say, I just want to make sure my body knows and all of its appetites and impulses who is in charge.

That's a practice that I think, though it's fraught with a lot of dangers and a lot of warnings in Scriptures about fasting, it is one example of saying no to things that I could do so that I can make clear and I can create the practice so the dogs have to look to me and say, "Master, is this OK?" That's the relationship you need to have with your flesh.

I came up with this illustration because I often hear about people talking about my sanctification, like I got a dog on this shoulder and a dog on that shoulder. This is the angel dog and this is the demon dog and I'm kind of stuck between them. That's not it at all. You are made new in Christ. You have the human brain and you're living enmeshed in a pack of dogs. Those are the dog brains. You need to be in charge. And just like my dog, that never learned to obey me because I never worked or trained him, it's time for us to train ourselves for godliness. Matter of fact, we get the word gymnasium from the word where Paul says to Timothy, "train yourself for godliness." Train yourself. Be like you're going to go to the gym and train yourself.

Well, here's the good news, and I've left this part out and you think, "Well, it sounds like heresy because I know that you started this with this is the Fruit of the Spirit and if it is the Fruit of the Spirit, then you say "then this is God. This is God that's at work in you. This is God. Paul said God's strength works in him. This God, you've quoted Isaiah 40 before, God gives us strength. It's about God. Matter of fact, if it's a Fruit of the Spirit, we're passive. You can put it on cruise control. Put your feet up on the desk because God is going to do this." Hey, give that a try for a year and see how that works. I understand this is a Fruit of the Spirit. But even notice how it's translated, because that's what the word leads us to. It's called God-control. Right? Love, joy, peace, patience,



kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, God-control. Is that what's it's called? No interactive 10:00 o'clock crowd. It's not what it's called. It's called, what kind of control? Self-control.

Matter of fact, let's turn to Isaiah 40, because I just quoted it and so often we think, "Oh, yeah, yeah, God gives strength, God's gives strength." I want to show you a shift from the subject to the object. Okay? The verb is "giving." Right? He's going to give strength. But let's watch that subtle change in this passage you may have missed in the subject here and that's helpful. We know whose strength we're talking about.

Let's go to Isaiah Chapter 40, a familiar passage. Look at verse 29. It starts with a pronoun, personal pronoun, "He." Well, there's our subject. "Gives power." Who's the "he?" Well, look back at the previous verse. It's the God. The God who has all the power. He's got all the smarts, all the understanding. He's strong. He never gets tired. "He gives," there it is, "power to the faint." I may be struggling, but he can give power, "to him who has no might, he," there it is again, "increases strength." Oh, good, good, good. Because that's what I need. "Even though young people," man, "they faint, they grow weary." There is nothing really in their lives that is their own and autonomy. They can't do it. Right? "Young men all fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew his strength."

No, wait a minute. The pronoun now shifts to their strength. Their strength. Wait a minute. If you wait for the Lord, which is an idiom for praying and persevering in prayer and consistently asking God and begging God, well, "they're going to renew their strength. They're going to mount up on wings like eagles and run and not grow weary and walk and not faint." They're walking. They're running. They're flying. And it's their strength that God increases.

This is what we call in theology, here's the word "synergism." There's a synergism in our sanctification. If you're a good theologian, you will affirm monergism in our justification. God is the one who is saving us as fallen, dead sinners in our trespasses. But now, new in Christ, we have a new heart, as it says in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. We get a new heart and the new heart is not by itself. We're not walking the pack of dogs alone. It says not only will I make a new spirit in them, but I will give them my Spirit. And as we've quoted many times from this platform, we got the small "s" spirit. Me, I get a new heart. I get now a new Christian brain. And I'm still surrounded by dog brains, my flesh. But, he now, the God brain, walks with me in this. I'm going to give them my spirit and I'm going to move them to keep my commandments, keep that pack of dogs in line. That is the picture in this text. If we see the synergism, then we know, as Paul said, I worked harder than all the other apostles, and yet it was God working in me. All the strength is derivative. God works in us.

But let's go back to Paul talking to the Philippines. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." That's going to feel like work. You're going to have the calluses. You might have the bloody hands. You're going to work really hard to manage your flesh. That's true. But God is the God who's going to empower you. He's going to give you strength. He's going to move you through this. Do you feel like it's a passive practice? Never, never, ever will it feel passive. You're going to work harder than you ever worked if you're going to get serious about self-control. If we don't want to sin this week, we're going to have to work hard.



But here's the element I want to add. I want to end with this. Number three, you need to "Beg God For Strength." He'll renew your strength and your strength will be a godly strength, but he's going to fuel that strength. But it is going to be, as that phrase says, when you wait upon the Lord, which is an expression of that ongoing persevering, consistent praying where you're saying, "God, I'm begging you for it." I like that word "beg." Because in Scripture, "Proseuchomai," it's the word for prayer, it's a normal word for prayer. Then there's a word every now and then in the Greek New Testament "Deomai." And deomai, used a few times, well, a handful of times, mostly you have the common word for prayer. But then you have the word for prayer, deomai, and when you have that, usually in the Greek New Testament, it's translated into English as "praying earnestly" or "to pray earnestly." They add that extra word because deomai is really strong.

In Luke, when God says we ought to be praying for strength to get through a trial, strength, getting through a trial or a temptation, he says you need to deomai for it. You need to beg God for it. So I'm asking you to start to beg God for strength. You have walking with you in this life the Holy Spirit. In the Fruit of the Spirit, as you say, "God, I need this," it is that ongoing, persistent, begging kind of prayer in the midst of the trial that Jesus was experiencing, he says, "Come and watch and pray with me for an hour." An hour? Even that should be convicting for us. Right? When was the last time you prayed for a solid hour? A solid hour. "Well, I don't have time for that." Well, we have time to feed our face. I bet you fed your face for more than an hour in one day. Right? And all I'm saying is it's interesting to see all these things. I'm absolutely yielding to my impulses to eat every day, which I'm suggesting you do. Right? Most days, right? Of course. But I really need to recognize what I need sometimes is to say I need more focused times of deomai-ing, of a begging God to give me that strength that he says he can give me.

God gives strength. Which, by the way, there's a multifaceted approach to this in terms of begging God. If you going to pray for an hour about self-control, there are lots of aspects to it. Think back to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 when he tells us things to pray for: daily bread, worship, all that, forgiving those who've sinned against us. There's that one statement where he says this, "and lead us not into temptation." You've got to walk between here and next Sunday. There's going to be a lot of fire hydrants, a lot of, you know, things scurrying across the path that want to get your flesh, the dogs, the dog pack of your life, off the track.

There are a lot of attractive things for it to get into, a lot of ankles to bite. You need to say this, "God, I just pray that you would not lead us into temptation. God, please mitigate those temptations. God, get that down to where you... I'm not asking for this to be, you know, it's so easy. But God, please help me in this." The more you pray about that, the more you're going to see there are situations as it says, you should "make no provision for the flesh." There are situations, I hope there are apps you've deleted. I hope there are meetings you choose not to go to. I hope there are alliances you're not willing to make. I hope there are things in your life where you say there are channels I'm going to block. I'm not going to be a part of those things because my self-control is not aided by my participation in those arenas. "If you hand causes you to sin, cut it off throw it from you."



I mean, the idea of dealing seriously with temptation, I think it starts by us begging God for the strength of self-control and praying about things like "don't lead us into temptation." And the next phrase in that prayer in Matthew 6, "and deliver us from evil." If you look at that particular phrase, even the footnotes there, help us recognize that that phrase may actually mean the "evil one" the way it's worded there. I know this: Satan would love to get the dogs of my life off the track. He loves for them to make a mess of Christian's lives. "He's a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." So I know this God, I need to pray more often about my temptations. I need to pray more often about the strength. I need to pray more often about the spiritual battle in all this. And I need to pray specifically.

Can I turn you to one last passage? Psalm 141. Psalm 141. Here's David praying and he prays specifically for aspects of his life that he knows are really hard to control. He goes back in his mind here to what we talked about in James 3. I mean, this one member of the body, this yapping Chihuahua that just won't stop and he says this, "God, I need your strength." You need to get specific about praying about areas. When I talk about self-control, the things that you're thinking about that lack in your life, I need you to pray for those, pray specifically for those.

Look what he does. Talking about prayer in the first two verses. Right? "I'm calling out to you. Hear my voice. May my prayer be a good thing to you like incense. Like when I lift up my hands in prayer like the evening sacrifice. Please hear my prayer." And then here's his prayer specifically, verse 3. "Set a guard, O Yahweh, set a guard over my mouth." God, please just muzzle my mouth. "Keep watch over the doors of my lips!" Please, God, focus on the things that help me. "Do not let my heart be inclined to evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds." I mean, I'm just saying here is the problem. We don't often ask and we don't ask specifically for the self-control we know we need.

And just to quote the next chapter from James 3, go to James 4 in your mind. He says this. He says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." Some of you have terrible self-control because you're really not praying much for it. And if you do, it's one minute here or two minutes there. I think we need to beg God for strength, to control the passions of our lives and to say, "God, I'm going to control this. I don't have sometimes the self-control I need or anything else because I don't ask."

But if you know your Bible, do you know the next phrase? "Sometimes you ask and you don't receive." Why? "Because you ask with..." what does James 4 say? "You ask with wrong motives." You might be sitting there saying, "Yeah, you know what? I have problems with food. Talking about self-control. I really want to be better with the food. You know, this sermon, I'm going to be a bit more consistent with the food. I going to be disciplined with the food. Because, you know, I just really need to get down, need to drop 25 pounds. I'm going to do it. And, you know, I'd look so good. And people will say how good I'm looking, and I like to even get in smaller clothes. Like, she's so much skinnier than me. I want to look like her. I just, man, God, if I could only just look better."

You can ask for self-control for all the wrong reasons. You understand that, right? So you need to check your motives. If you have a problem with food, if you're a glutton, yeah, you should deal with that. But it isn't so that everybody can say, "Oh, you look so great. You lost some weight." That's not the reason. The reason is nothing should dominate you. You should be able to say to

yourself, I'm not going to eat that. I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to think that. I'm not going to look at that. I'm not going to say those things. That's the control your spirit ought to have over your flesh. You've got to be willing to say, I am going to pray specifically and I going to pray for the right motives, because the path that you've laid out for me and the good works you have for me between this Sunday and next Sunday, I want to walk in that path to your glory. I want you to look at me as the Christian brain controlling the dog brains of my flesh and saying, "God, I want to get from here to there. I'm going to glorify you with my body, with this pack of dogs. Because I've been bought with a price." Sometimes we don't have because we don't ask, and we need to ask. We need to beg God for that strength.

I hope that if nothing else comes out of this sermon, that you would begin to pray in a way that you've never prayed about the self-control in your life. That the points of conviction you might have had when you confessed your sin early in this sermon and said, "God, yes, I want a fresh start," that you say to God, "God, I need to pray about these things." It's amazing when we pray and linger in prayer and wait on the Lord, which is an idiom for praying, praying for the Lord, praying for his answers, asking him to do things specifically in our lives, like putting a guard over our mouth if the mouth is the issue on the table. And saying, "God, I know that you can grant strength." And even though I was faint, even though I was weary, even though my self-control stunk and I stumbled seven times last week, I'm going to rise again. I'm going to get up because I don't walk this alone.

In the ancient world they built cities, and because of the ancient tools of warfare, one of the best ways to secure your population was to build a wall around your city. A big stone, tall, high, thick wall that a battering ram couldn't take down. And that's the thing that would protect you. Proverbs has a little verse about self-control in ancient cities. It says, "The one who lacks self-control is like a city whose walls have been breached," walls have fallen down. So you picture an old city with the walls down and you say, well, that's the person with no self-control because the walls are there to keep things out. Well, you might have gates, but the gates are open at particular times and they let things through and there are people there checking what goes in and out. But when you have no walls, I mean, the gates are nothing. The gates don't matter. The portals into the city are everywhere because you have no walls. He says, that's what it's like for the man who has no self-control. Their lives are a mess. Those dogs are like they don't even have leashes. It's terrible.

When Jeremiah after the Babylonian exile found out that the city was torn down and he was grieving and praying over that, he asked the king if he could go back. The king said yes, gave him money, miraculously God opened up the way for them to go and repair the walls. In Chapter 6 of Nehemiah they complete the thing. But in the early chapters, we have the story of him repairing the walls. And of course, it's not just him, it's a whole team of people. It says in Chapter 4 of Nehemiah that as they went to go repair those walls, there were so many enemies that did not want the walls rebuilt. There were two guys, Sanballet and Tobiah in particular, who were adversaries. And not only that, you had a bunch of people who did all they could to make sure those walls did not get built. But Nehemiah knew and so did that generation of Israelites, if we could just build this wall we can have security in the city, we could reinhabit it, and we can have



the kind of city and life that God would expect us to have. We need those walls up. So they built and they built.

It's interesting, in Chapter 4, he says I'm going to take the Israelite people and I'm going to turn them into two groups because I need a group who is going to put the trowel and the mortar and stack those stones and build that wall. And then I need a whole group of people who are going to have spears and swords and bows. I'm going to put them in coats of armor and they're going to stand and defend as we build this wall. Not only that, the guys who were actually building the wall, they had a trowel in one hand and it says 3 or 4 verses later that as they built, they had their swords strapped to their hip. That was a vigilant, urgent, critically important step in their minds to say we got to work as a team to make this happen.

I've said that a lot on our courtyard sermons. But if you're not in a small group and you're trying to do the Christian life on your own, trying to build the walls by yourself, I mean, it's a losing proposition. We're about to meet with our small group leaders and recast the vision for the importance of small groups in our church. You, let me just say this with all the authority of Christ, you need to be in a small group. You have to be in a small group. You've got to get chairs, side-by-side, face-to-face. Because in that we start to do the things that the Bible says we can do. There's accountability, there's confessing sin, there's us encouraging one another and building each other up. And all of that is about putting these breaches in the walls, putting them back together so that we can live this Christian life the way that God designed. We're going to need people that have our back. I mean, that's what was going on in Nehemiah Chapter 4.

If you're not in a small group, I exhort you to get in a small group and make sure you have that team where people aren't just sitting here observing sermons with their chairs side-by-side. But you're in relationships where chairs are face-to-face and you're sharing your struggles and you're keeping each other accountable and you're praying for each other. And while one person is working to put another brick in the wall, the other person is there defending and protecting and saying, "I got your back." Got to have more of that because if we don't have self-control, we got nothing.

You're not going to see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, none of that's going to work without self-control because the whole context of Galatians 5 is the battle between the spirit and the flesh. And thankfully, it's not just your spirit. God Spirit's going to empower you. But I just call you to prayer to beg the Lord for the kind of strength he promises to give for those who linger in prayer and take this battle seriously. May God give us more self-control in our Christian life this week.

Let's pray. God. We need this. We need it now, it seems more than ever in a world that's filled with temptations for us to walk off the path. God, give us the kind of resolute commitment to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. To excel in our mastery over our impulses and desires to be able to say with the apostle Paul that the body knows who's in charge. Our human impulses know who the master is and who the slave is.



So God, give us more of a commitment to pursuing and attaining the kind of self-control that we know is all derivative, all comes from your gracious hand. But it's certainly callouses our hands and sometimes leads them to bleed as we fight, as Peter said, against these passions that wage war against our soul. That's not going to happen just by hearing a sermon. Actually, the good of this sermon isn't seen until we have some time to put it into practice. We turn some things off so we can pray more, we cancel a couple of things maybe our kids are in or we're in so that we can be in a small group. We work together to confess our sins and encourage each other and build each other up and help each other walk through this world that's fraught with not only temptations and dangers, but an enemy that wants to destroy us.

So give us self-control, God, to your glory and your honor. Not for our pleasures, not so we can spend any of the answers to our prayers on our own reputation, our own good, but so that we can please you. We can serve an audience of one hearing from you one day, I trust, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Make that true of us, God, I pray as we take this seriously.

In Jesus name. Amen.