



Session 1 – Why Should I Have Self-Control?

Sometimes half the battle in changing is really wanting to change. Self-control in particular is one of those areas where it can be difficult to want to see a radical change in our lives. There are many reasons why our hearts resist the idea of developing self-control, including...

1. Self-control sounds enslaving (1 Corinthians 9:27).
2. Self-control sounds like the death of pleasure.
3. Self-control means sacrificing what I want.
4. Self-control is something we have tried and failed.

So before we can really spend any time discussing what self-control is and how we acquire it, we first need to convince ourselves, with the help of the Spirit, that self-control is in fact necessary! Here are five reasons why we should desire self-control.

We Live in a Corrupt Culture

The two passages that deal at length with the issue of self-control specifically are found in 1 Corinthians 9-10 and Titus 2, written to people in the cities of Corinth and Crete.

Corinth was a city that was very prosperous and very pagan. Many temples and idols have been found in excavations, and although not as immoral as the earlier city razed by Rome, immorality no doubt abounded. In 1 Corinthians alone, Paul

addresses the issues of professing believers engaging in prostitution (6:12-20) and incest (5:1) and the church had members who had been sexually immoral, homosexual, and adulterous.

Paul himself tells us how bad Crete was. "One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," (Titus 1:12-13). Both Corinth and Crete were debauched cities, and this surrounding corruption compelled Paul to address the issue of self-control.

Statistics, studies, and illustrations to prove that this is the case in America today are abundant but not really necessary. We live in a culture that calls evil good and good evil, that view pornography as normal and healthy, and views waiting for marriage to have sex as an oddity. These factors simply mean all the more that we ought to focus on living self-controlled lives.

The Problem Is Pervasive for Young Men

While temptation is common to all, some temptations and problems seem to be more specific to certain people than others. The problem of self-control is one that

1. Young men struggle today.

A report by CNN published July 29, 2016 found that adults spend an astonishing 10 hours and 39 minutes each day consuming media. 81% of adults have a smart phone which is used for on average 1 hour and 39 minutes to view media.

94% of adults own an HDTV and spend 4.5 hours watching movies and shows.¹

The New York Post cited a study that showed 1 in 4 millennials spend more than 5 hours a day on their smartphone and half of them spend at least 3 hours.²

2. Young men struggled in the 19th century.

Young men, you form a large and most important class in the population of this country; but where, and in what condition, are your souls? Regardless of where we turn for an answer, the report will be one and the same! Let us ask any faithful minister of the gospel, and note what he will tell us. How many unmarried young people can he remember who come to the Lord's Supper? Who are the most backward about the doctrines of salvation, the most irregular about Sunday services, the most difficult to draw to weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings, the most inattentive to whatever is being preached? Which part of his congregation fills him with the most anxiety? Who are the Reubens for whom he has the deepest "searchings of heart"? Who in his flock are the hardest to manage, who require the most frequent warnings and rebukes, who cause him the greatest uneasiness and sorrow, who keep him most constantly in fear for their souls, and seem the most hopeless? Depend on it, his answer will always be, "The Young Men."

Let us ask the parents in any county throughout this land, and see what they will generally say. Who in their families give them the most pain and trouble? Who need the most watchfulness, and most often provoke and disappoint them? Who are the first to be led away from what is right, and the last to remember cautions and good advice? Who are the most difficult to keep in order and limits? Who most frequently break out into open sin, disgrace the name they bear, make their friends unhappy, embitter the older relatives, and cause them to die with sorrow in their hearts? Depend on it, the answer will generally be, "The Young Men."

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/30/health/americans-screen-time-nielsen/index.html>

² <http://nypost.com/2017/05/18/millennials-waste-five-hours-a-day-doing-this-one-thing/>

Let us ask the judges and police officers, and note what they will reply. Who goes to the night clubs and bars the most? Who make up street gangs? Who are most often arrested for drunkenness, disturbing the peace, fighting, stealing, assaults, and the like? Who fill the jails, and penitentiaries, and detention homes? Who are the class which requires the most incessant watching and looking after? Depend on it, they will at once point to the same group, they will say, "The Young Men."³

3. Young men struggled in 1st century Crete.

Paul, in addressing different categories of gender and age, gives specific instructions to old men, old women, young women, and young men in Titus 2. Most of these categories he instructs to exhibit several different character traits to display, but with young men he only gives one: self-control (2:6). This suggests that while self-control is a battle for all (2:2, 4, 5), it is uniquely a battle for young men.

4. Young men struggled in ancient Israel.

Proverbs 1-9 are repeatedly directed toward "my son." 23 times in this book the wisdom is presented as a father giving wisdom to his son. In this context this term refers to one who is young and needs guidance (in Proverbs 7:7 it is one of the "sons", translated "youths," that is captivated by the beauty of the adulteress). The warnings of wisdom, especially in regard to moral purity, are directed specifically at young men.

None of this should result in either a defeated spirit or an excuse to sin. Rather, this should cause us to realize the potential danger and work hard in this area of our lives.

³ J.C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, 1886.

A Lack of Self-Control Is a Root Sin

As one of my colleagues pointed out, self-control is a root sin that leads to many other sins. In many ways anger, lust, gossiping, stealing, laziness, and many other sins are a lack of self-control. Developing the skill of telling yourself “no” will be immensely helpful in your sanctification. A failure to show self-control opens you up to attack from Satan (Proverbs 25:28).

The Cost of Failure Is Great

1. A lack of self-control can hurt your family (2 Samuel 12:10).
2. A lack of self-control can ruin your ministry (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Numbers 20:10-13).
3. A lack of self-control can cost missed opportunities (Ephesians 5:15-16).

The Rewards for Success Are Great

Self-control is necessary to accomplish much for Christ. Living a self-controlled life will result in greater productivity for the kingdom (John 9:4).