

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
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Self-control and the Holy Spirit  
Galatians 5:16-26

5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

5:17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

5:21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

## 1. Self-Control

Dr. Swindoll wrote a book and listed eight essentials for spiritual practices for every Christian. They are “Intimacy with God.”

“Simplicity of living,” “Silence and Solitude in meditation,” “Surrender to God’s will,” “Prayer,” “Humility,” “Self-Control,” and “Sacrifice.” Regarding “Self-Control,” the seventh practice, he wrote his own story in the book.

When he was relaxing in his living room watching a TV program, he took a half-gallon of ice cream from the freezer, and sat down with a spoon. He ate it all. He microwaved the last part of the ice cream and drank the melted ice cream. He hated wasting ice cream. He ate literally “all” of half-gallon ice cream.

Suddenly, he realized that his children were coming home. His kids were sure to want to eat ice cream, and notice that the ice cream was gone. Then, he quickly bought a new half gallon ice cream, the exact same one, and carefully placed it right where the other one was. He thought he could keep secret that he ate all the ice cream. But, he had forgotten that one of his kids had eaten a little bit out of the top of the other one. The whole family got found out what he did. The book did not told us what happened after that point. I’ll leave that to your imagination.

If you have a favorite snack, you may eat too much of it. If you like talking, you may talk too much. If you like drive, you may do speed while driving. People obsess over their hobbies and work, and break homes or impair their health.

Several words are used to express “sin” in the Bible. One of them, ‘harmartia’ has the meaning “out of place” in Greek. If the direction you are heading deviate from the direction defined by God, no matter how hard you work, it will be considered a “sin.” No matter how far the ball is hit by a baseball bat, it is a foul if it is out of boder. Even

with enthusiasm and diligence, unless you are headed in the right direction, it is “sin.” It is a good thing to be “diligent.” However, if you make a mistake in going the wrong direction, good things are inherently bad.

What is most desirable for humans is “love,” but this also becomes bad if you headed in the wrong direction. As is often the case, such as drowning a child, taking a spouse of another person, stealing the company's money to contribute to a lover. It is a common thing to confuse God’s love with selfish love. The most beautiful thing called “love” may become the most ugliest thing. It’s the many horrors of sin.

So, if you do nothing to avoid being outrageous, do you not have to commit any sins? No. According to the Bible, not doing anything, “Slothfulness” (‘oknelos’ in Greek) is also a sin. Jacob 4:17 says, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Of course it is important not to hurt the hearts of people, but it’s not enough. If you don’t give encouragement to those who really need it, or pretend not to see the wrong things done in front of you, it will be the sin of “slothfulness.” In most case, a major accident happens because someone did not perform his/her duty in timely manner. “Slothfulness” is never a small sin.

In words expressing sin, there is another one called “paraptoma.” This translates as “transgression” or “trespasses” and means exceeding standards and limits. Working is a good thing. However, working too much is harmful to both spirit and the body. Enjoying life is not a sin. However, it becomes a sin if it goes too far. Enjoying your hobbies is also allowed for Christians. But if it hinders studying the

Bible, praying to God, and worshiping Him, it is a sin. The heart seeking justice is something that is indispensable. But if it ends with anger, it will be a sin. The Bible says, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” (Ephesians 4: 26-27 ) If the anger for righteousness gets too much, it becomes a sin.

The sin of “missing the direction” can be compared to a car in which the steering wheel that ceases to function. The sin of “slothfulness” can be compared to a stopped car in a middle lane of the free way. The sin of “transgression” can be compared to a car in which the brake system ceases to function. And “self-control” is like a brake of a car. People whose “self-control” is very dangerous like the cars with ineffective brake system are very dangerous. Those who sincerely honor God should aim for a life without committing sins and wish to be cleansed from sins. For that, we always need to check whether "self-control," our brake system is okay.

## **2. Works of the Flesh**

Then, how do we acquire “self-control?” In order to do that, we need to understand the “flesh.” The Bible teaches us that there is the “flesh” behind sin. According to the Bible the “flesh” is the nature we had before we believed in Christ. In Galatians 5:17, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.” If you still have the innate nature, you can not train yourselves. Actually this is even worse because you foster the nature of going against God. We can not train the “flesh.” We should throw it away, “Let it die.” However, is it possible? We, human beings can not do it

but God can do it, and He made it happen through the cross of Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 5:24, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” When Jesus died on the cross, our “flesh,” “old self,” or “self-centered nature” died on the cross too. Along with the resurrection of Christ, our “spirit” and “new self” was born. The Bible teaches us not only “Christ died for us” but also “we died with Christ” in many verses such as Roman 6:4-8, Galatians 2:19, Corinthian 2:12-13, Corinthian 3:3 etc. The death of “old self” is referred as “Crucifixion of old self” and explained in sermons. Every single Christian needs to understand this concept.

Christians learn this doctrine by the Word of God and experience it through the Baptism and Lord’s Supper. When we are immersed in the water of Baptism, our “old self” die, and “new self” is born when we get out of the water. When we celebrate the cross of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper, we remember that Jesus and we died together on the cross. In Galatians 3:1, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.” How was Jesus Christ on the cross presented to those people? It was by the Lord’s Supper. We encounter the cross of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. The cross is not a history of 2000 years ago. We shall remember that our “flesh” and “old self” died on the cross.

We died against the flesh, and live by the Holy Spirit. According to Galatians 5:25, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” By doing these, we can acquire the “self-control.”

### **3. Fruit of the Spirit**

However, in order to be able to “walk with the Spirit” there is a step that must be taken. First of all, it is “born by the Spirit.” Jesus Christ said “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:5) When you believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit works in us, and we are born again. Without this “reincarnation,” we remain in the “flesh.”

Next is to grow to a “spirit man.” First Corinthians 3:1-3 says, But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” There are the words; “spiritual people,” “people of the flesh” and “human.” The “human” means “a person born,” “a person who has not experienced a rebirth by the Holy Spirit.” As a matter of fact, everyone born by the Holy Spirit should be a “spiritual people” or “people belonging to the Spirit,” but unfortunately even after receiving the Holy Spirit, but some remain in the flesh rather than obeying the Holy Spirit, and such people are called “people of the flesh” or “people belonging to the flesh.”

“People belonging to the flesh” are also called “infants in Christ.” Even though these people have not been born again or they are not separated from Christ. As it said, “to be in Christ,” they belong to Christ and have the Holy Spirit. However, they live according to the “flesh.”

Usually, “Infants” means pure in a good sense and potential of growth, but here is used to mean “men of the flesh.” Babies cry when they are hungry, get milk to feel better. It is totally self-centered and they live only for their own satisfaction. In other words, it lives on the principle of “comfort or discomfort.” As children grow, “good or bad” will become a standard of behavior. As adults, judgment criteria of “gain or loss” will also be added. Even if babies or little children are selfish, they are allowed because they shows as it is, but if adults do such a thing, it will be condemned like "they are immature.” Like we still have the self-centered nature after having become adults, a “man of the flesh” also lives in the way not worthy for Christian. We are called to grow as “adults in Christ,” not as “children in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28)

When we respond to this call, The “work of the flesh” such as “a misery, a dirt, a lewdness, an idolatry, a marvelous, an enmity, a fighting, a sorrow, an anger, a party honor, a division, a sect, a jealousy, a drunkenness, a banquet,” are excelled from us and instead “the fruit of the Spirit” such as “love, joy, peace, generosity, charity, goodwill, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” are fruited.

Please be aware that what comes from the flesh is called “works of the flesh,” and created from the Holy Spirit is called “the fruit of the Spirit.” “People of the flesh” is always active. Literally, they do “activities.” They do something and measure self-actualization. Moreover, they try to do things in their own power. “People of the flesh” live in the world of “Doing.”

But a “spiritual people” is different. They produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit like the plants bear fruit. The plants stay where they were

planted. It will not move around. However, plants are not doing nothing. Plants extend their roots deep in the ground. They stretch branches and receive the sun light with its leaves. The same is for the spiritual people. They root in Christ and take the nourishment of the Word. They seek the face of God and receive His grace. As heat, cold, storms and pests threaten the trees, trials also come to the “spiritual people.” But, the “spiritual people endure them. They wait for the life and power of God and do not rely on their own power. The “spiritual people” live in the world of “Being.”

Training of “self-control” is not a “training of patience.” It is a training to recognize the death of the flesh on the cross of Christ. It is a training to know that all Christians are lived by the Holy Spirit. And it is a training to walk by the Holy Spirit. Walking by the Holy Spirit brings us the fruit of “self-control.”

### **(Prayer)**

God, our Father, we “once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:3). But you gave us new life and transformed us by the Holy Spirit. You set us free from the works of the flesh and gave us the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You moved us from the world of “doing” to the world of “being.” Teach us and guide us to walk by the Holy Spirit in various ways of our daily life, starting in the worship and ministries for the Kingdom of God. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.