

**Genesis 25**

Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”

**Hebrews 12**

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

**Mark 15**

And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.

**Intro Question**

Paul places self-control at the end of the Fruit of the Spirit list. What is significant about listing love, joy, and the rest before self-control? If these qualities are communicable (sharable) qualities of God, how do you think God is self-controlled?

**Background**

St Paul sets up his discussion of the Fruits of the Spirit like this: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

**Discuss:**

**I. The Trade**

We find in Genesis how a simple wager can have profound consequences. In the story of Jacob stalking his hunter brother, Esau for his birthright, we learn that Esau is characterized by what he desires. His red hair matches the color of the soup. Jacob boils the frog of his brother stewing him into handing over his birthright in a moment of indulgence. At the same moment Jacob is himself exhibiting the counterfeit quality to self-control, prideful willpower.

**II. The Fake**

Self-control for the sake of one’s self is the fake. When we esteem this fruit of Spirit, quality of God as the highest good, we trade life in Christ for Stoicism. As a response to licentious Epicureanism, stoicism held “inner-dominion” as ultimate. They saw the body with its desires as an object to be stifled with a harsh, “Stop-it!” We can laugh at this Bob Newhart, StopIt! bit because we know that The Flesh (St Paul’s word) is real. It commands and wills us until God invades. He will free us but not for the sake of ourselves.

**III. The Treasure**

By the same principle of desire that we saw exhibited in Esau, we come to find that self-control flows from the worship offered to the one who chose the ultimate obedience over immediate glory. Jesus hungers to eat a meal with his disciples and so offered himself as a feast. We see something similar in the war hero Desmond Doss who possessed such self-control that he rescued over fifty men in the horror of war as a conscientious objector after being harassed and abused for his conviction. In the self-control of Jesus, we see that he treasured his Father above his own highest good obeying for the sake of those with whom he shared humanity—you and me. Jesus’ self-control is his love for you and the Father.

**Questions and Prayer**

- 1.) Esau traded God’s promise, traded God for a bowl of soup. What do you and I trade God for?
- 2.) What can we learn about self-control from seeing the way that Jesus suffered? Is he a Stoic?
- 3.) What holds your gaze in such a way that your soul is molded? If the eyes are a window to the soul, what do you open the curtains to?

Father, you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Jesus, your non-coercive dominion of our life and desires is our self-control. Thank you for being a good king. Spirit, we need eyes to see and ears to hear of this Jesus who shows us God the Father. We need the light of your holy fire to light our path with the Word. Amen

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