

LESSONS ON SELF-CONTROL

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

Well, it's that time of year again... the time when people make New Year's resolutions. Isn't it ironic that people look to the start of a New Year with hope for self-improvement despite the fact that New Year's resolutions are notorious for being broken!

Studies show that about 92% of people fail to keep their New Year's resolutions. In fact, most don't even make it to the end of January. One study I saw used statistical data to pin-point January 12th as the date by which most people have already broken their resolutions. (New York Post, "New Year's Resolutions Last Exactly This Long", Shireen Khalil, Dec. 21, 2018.) Just 12 days!

So, what should we make of all that? Well, it's apparent that *many* people recognize their need to make changes in their lives. I guess *that's* a good thing. But it's even more clear that human beings lack the resolve to see those changes through. Even when those changes are things we want for ourselves we lack the self-discipline to produce lasting change.

And that's not just true of unbelievers setting goals for diet and exercise. No, it's also true of believers engaged in the daily battle against the flesh. The ongoing struggle for our sanctification is a war that tests our self-discipline, not just at the start of a new year, but every day of our Christian lives!

Be honest, aren't there areas of sin you have battled with over and over again, things you've promised yourself you would do better at, only to feel defeated when you failed yet again? Maybe you've been tempted to wonder if God can continue forgive you when you've failed 1,000 times already.

After all, believers are instructed in **2 Peter 1:5-8** to pursue self-control:

⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in your knowledge, self-control...

Peter goes on to list a few other attributes to grow in, and then in verse 8 he says:

⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, if we want to be useful and fruitful as followers of Jesus then Peter says self-control is something we need. It's not optional. Nor is it impossible -- something only a few "super-Christians" can ever hope to obtain. No, self-discipline is something all Christians are to exhibit.

In fact, a believer's ability to exercise self-control is supposed to set us apart from unbelievers.

2 Timothy 3 says, as the final days approach...

² people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, (and, here it is...) without self-control.

That is what 2 Timothy 3 says unbelievers are characterized by. And as followers of Christ, we are warned not to be like them! One of the ways we are to be set apart from the world is through our self-discipline. Self-control is a hallmark of a Christian.

Now, if we just ended this sermon here I think every one of us would go home utterly depressed. Maybe even doubting our salvation. After all, who among us can say that we are self-disciplined? That we have mastered the ability to control our desires, passions and appetites? That our will to follow Christ faithfully in every area of life has brought our flesh into submission? I know I can't say that. I'm confronted daily by my own weakness against sin.

So, where does that leave us then? Are we just to wallow in despair and defeat? Or does the Bible offer us hope and direction for growth in the area of self-control?

Well, thanks be to God, He has not left us to struggle on our own. The Bible does in fact provide us with helpful instruction pertaining to self-discipline. Please turn in your Bibles to **1 Corinthians 10**. We are going to be focusing on verses 12-14 this morning but to get the context of those verses I'll start reading with verse 1 of chapter 10.

Now, it may not be immediately apparent that the passage we are about to read has anything to do with self-control. In fact, the word "self-control" isn't even used in the verses we are going to study today. But the first word in 1 Corinthians 10 is the word "*for*" which means what is about to follow is information supporting what has just been said. And what Paul is talking about at the close of chapter 9 is self-discipline.

There he compares the Christian life to that of an athlete. And he says in **chapter 9:25**...

²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.

Now, all of us today know of the Olympic games. Believe it or not, the 2020 Summer Olympics are just a few short months away. But in Paul's Day, the city of Corinth held their own games which were just as renowned as those held in Athens. And so Paul's illustration of an athlete preparing for competition would have been one the Corinthian people could immediately connect with. They would have been familiar with the intense self-denial an athlete would go through to condition himself for competition.

As one commentator put it, "***Athletes [...] in preparing themselves for the games abstained from unwholesome foods, wine and sexual indulgence.***" (Blue Letter Bible, Strong's Notes on *enkrateuomai* (G1467)).

So, in the Corinthian worldview athletes were the epitome of self-discipline. And Paul compares his own exercise of self-control to that of an athlete. He says in **verse 26**...

²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I DISCIPLINE my body and make it my slave.

Paul shares his own example to encourage all followers of Christ to be as self-controlled as a top ranked athlete preparing for Olympic-level competition! And so as we come to chapter 10 it is this call to self-control... self-discipline... that Paul is now elaborating on.

Follow along as I read **1 Corinthians 10:1-14**...

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." ⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

And then Paul says in verses 12-14...

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Paul ended chapter 9 using the image of an athlete an example of self-discipline. Now, in chapter 10, he contrasts that with the bad example of his Israelite ancestors who lacked self-control.

Although at Mt. Sinai they had vowed to keep all of God's commands, the history of Israel's time in the wilderness followed a continual cycle of human disobedience leading to divine judgment.

And, as the old saying goes, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." So, Paul reminds the Corinthians of Israel's past failures. In fact, Paul says these things happened to the Israelites as an example to us that is, to believers of the church age. They were written down for our instruction so we would learn from them and not give in to temptation as they did.

You know, Satan cannot rob believers of their salvation. But he can rob them of their fruitfulness, their effectiveness. And one of the most successful means he has of doing that is through temptation. It worked with Eve, and it is still working today. Which is why you and I need to consider carefully Paul's words here because all of us face temptation. Whether it is temptation that comes through the allurements and enticements of something attractive to our flesh, or the temptation that comes through adversity and trial that threatens our faithfulness to God, we all face temptation and so we all need self-discipline.

And in verses 12-14 Paul provides us with four lessons about self-control that will help us in our battle against temptation. If you are taking notes this morning, these four lessons are organized as first, two mistakes to avoid, and then two practices to implement.

1. First is the Mistake of Overestimating Ourselves.

We see that in verse 12 where Paul states...

***Therefore let him who thinks he stands...
take heed that he does not fall.***

One of the greatest enemies of self-discipline is self-confidence! Thinking too highly of our own abilities. Self-confidence undermines the urgency for self-control. And so, Paul warns us not to make the mistake of over-estimating ourselves.

Now, typically, we hear this warning stated the other way around -- "Don't under-estimate your opponent." But underestimating our opponent actually flows from a prideful view of ourselves: Thinking we have nothing to worry about. They're no match for us. We can handle it. We're up to the challenge. History is full of generals whose defeats can be tied directly back to an over-abundance of self-confidence.

Over-confidence leads to carelessness, and carelessness leads to defeat. We see that lesson in the history of Israel in the wilderness. Look at verses 1-4 again...

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the

sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

The Israelites had experienced miracle after miracle in the wilderness, which should have produced in them a humble dependence upon God. But instead, the people became arrogant, self-confident and presumptuous. We can imagine them saying themselves, "Hey, I'm part of God's chosen people. I walked through the parted sea. I ate the manna. I drank the water from the Rock. I'm good to go!" And because they overestimated themselves, verses 7-10 recount how they fell into sin as a result.

And so, Paul tells us in verse 5, "All may have done this, and all may have done that. ***Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not well pleased.***"

I think the danger for people today is to say, "Hey, I'm a member of the church. I walked the isle. I prayed the prayer. I was baptized. I'm good to go!" ***Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.***

Paul must have seen the same self-confidence at play in the Corinthian church, because he warns them five times in his epistle against being arrogant -- against overestimating themselves. In fact, in chapters 8 & 9 as well as here in chapter 10, Paul is confronting the Corinthians on how some of them have allowed confidence in their doctrinal knowledge to lead them to abuse their Christian liberty.

In particular, the Corinthians had become reckless in their involvement with idolatry (10:15-22). Since they "*knew idols were nothing*" (8:4), they believed they were sufficiently inoculated against any dangerous influences that participating in pagan feasts might pose. They were confident that their knowledge made them immune to any spiritual harm.

But Israel had also been confident in themselves, and look what happened to them. An entire generation ended up corpses in the wilderness, buried where they fell.

Like them, the Corinthians had become cavalier about the spiritual dangers they were exposing themselves to. In their pride, they thought they could handle it. But as **Proverbs 16:18** warns... ***Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.***

You and I need to be warned of the danger of overconfidence because you and I are just as susceptible to being seduced by the idolatry of our day as the Corinthians were in theirs. We too can have our sensitivity to the perils of sin dulled by over-confidence in ourselves. If we

ever start to think we are above the dangers of worldliness, that in the name of "Christian liberty" we can flirt with temptation without any risk of giving in to compromise, then we are setting ourselves up for moral failure! **Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.**

Now, the word "fall" in verse 12 doesn't refer to losing one's salvation and falling into eternal judgment, but rather it refers to falling into disapproval and the chastening discipline of God. (Wycliffe, pg. 1246)

As John MacArthur notes...

"Like [the Israelites] we can forfeit our blessing, reward, and effectiveness in the Lord's service if, in overconfidence and presumption, we take our liberties too far and fall into disobedience and sin. We will not lose our salvation, but we can easily lose our virtue and usefulness, and become disqualified in the race of the Christian life." (MacArthur, First Corinthians, pg. 226)

As MacArthur indicates, self-confident Christians are prone to abusing their liberty in Christ to their own harm. But the danger is not only to them alone. Their compromises can lead others into harm as well -- others who are tempted to follow in their footsteps. Causing others to stumble was a major concern for Paul as he addressed the issues of idolatry and liberty in chapters 8 and 9.

Parents, our children in particular are at risk. Are you modeling behavior that your kids can follow in without fear of coming to spiritual harm? We need to take the dangers of temptation seriously both for ourselves and out of love and concern for those watching us!

Notice that it is those who "think they stand" that Paul's warning is directed at because it is those who feel most secure in themselves who are at the greatest risk of falling. That's because when we feel self-assured we grow insensitive to our dependence upon God, and upon all His means of grace.

As self-confidence grows the need we feel for God's word, for prayer and for the church wanes. If you aren't spending time regularly in God's word, if you aren't devoting time each day to prayer, if you aren't opening up to your church family and sharing your struggles with others asking them to counsel you and to be praying for you, then why not? Could it be that you aren't pursuing those things because you actually think you're okay without them? That you don't really need them? Have you become desensitized to your spiritual dependency? ¹² **Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.**

Spiritual maturity doesn't result in a lesser need for the means of God's grace, but leads to a greater reliance upon them! None of us here today are beyond the need for those things. And so, none of us are beyond the need for this warning not overestimate ourselves.

But neither are we to overestimate what we are up against. That is the second mistake to avoid:

2. The Mistake of Overestimating Temptation (v. 13)

Paul knew it is human tendency to swing back and forth between the extremes of self-assurance and utter despair. So he follows up his warning against overestimating ourselves with a warning against overestimating temptation.

Now again, we are used to being told, "Don't under-estimate your opponent." So, we might wonder how *over*-estimating temptation could be dangerous for us. How could that lead to harm?

Where over-estimating ourselves causes us to see temptation as insignificant, over-estimating temptation causes us to see it as invincible -- as if caving into temptation were inevitable. Overestimating temptation leads to hopelessness and can leave us thinking, "Why bother? What good is resisting temptation when I know I am not strong enough to win? I know I'll just give in eventually -- I always have. So, why fight it?"

Whatever trial or temptation you are facing, is your tendency to be mired in despair? Overwhelmed at the size of what you are up against? Thinking that victory is impossible?

We see an illustration of this when the Israelite's first refused to enter the Promised Land. If you think about why they refused to enter the land it was because they looked at the challenge before them and determined it was too much for them. The cities of Canaan were too well fortified. The people were too big and too numerous. What they were up against was simply too great! In their minds, they were already defeated, so they turned back. They missed out on the blessings God had for them all because they over-estimated what they faced. And so failure became a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is the danger this mistake poses.

And so, after he warns the Corinthians to take heed lest they fall, Paul now assures them that they *need* not fall! Giving into sin is not inevitable. In verse 13 Paul declares...

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.

NO temptation we face is unique to us. *Whatever* we may be up against, it is common to man. Whether the source of our temptation is a trial we face or an enticement to sin we are not the only ones to have faced it.

And that is important to remember because Satan likes to make us think that no one has the struggles we have. "No one can understand what I am up against. There may be hope for others, but not for me. The promises of scripture may apply to everyone else's situation, but not to mine." Are you ever tempted to think about your circumstances like that? Those statements simply aren't true. They are all just ploys of the devil!

1 Peter 5:8 tells us that *Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*. You know how lions hunt? They work to separate an animal out from the rest of the herd and then, when it is on its own, they pick it off easily. Satan tries to do the same thing with us, convincing us that we are all alone in our struggle, no one can understand, no one can help. And so, rather than reaching out to others and opening up to others, we draw in on ourselves until weakened from striving on our own and overwhelmed with hopelessness we give up.

Sometimes that self-imposed isolation is due to feelings of shame. We feel embarrassed by the nature of our particular struggle and become more concerned about others finding out than about us getting the help we desperately need. Or, we pridefully think we *should* be able to handle our struggles on our own. And so, we're embarrassed to appear as weak and needy as we really are.

Rather than being transparent about our struggles, we show up to worship with our "church-face" on pretending "Everything's fine, everything's good... everything's good, everything's fine," and we turn our backs on the counsel, encouragement, and accountability that God has intended to be ours through His people.

We need to remember that whatever we have done or are tempted to do, whatever trial or difficulty we are facing, we are not the first or only ones to have been there. *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.*

If we remember that, then we begin to realize we *aren't* alone. In fact, God has surrounded us with a community of believers who understand, who love us, and who want to help us. God has graced us with brothers and sisters who can relate to us right where we are at... because they struggle too.

So, don't believe the lies that you are all alone, that no one can understand your struggle, your situation. Don't overestimate your temptation.

Okay, so far we've been warned of two mistakes people make:

- The Mistake of Over-estimating Ourselves...
- and the Mistake of Over-estimating Temptation.

Those are things we need to guard against. Those are things we should NOT do. But what then *should* we do? Well, Paul's teaching here points us towards two things, both of which are crucial for fighting temptation and growing in self-control.

3. First is The Practice of Running to God (v. 13b)

Now, that may *seem* obvious and overly simplistic. But is it *really*? Think about both of the mistakes we just talked about. The same error was made in each of them. Both mistakes involve us looking to ourselves -- measuring our own abilities against what we are facing. Either I look to myself with unrealistic confidence in my own ability which leads to spiritual recklessness, or I look to myself and allow the reality of my own inadequacy to handle what I am up against to leave me in a pit of hopeless despair. Either way, I am looking to myself in the fight against temptation, and that will always ultimately lead to defeat.

So, what's the Bible's secret to "self-discipline"? The secret to self-discipline is that it doesn't start with self. It starts with God.

Now, we should know that already because **Galatians 5** tells us self-control is fruit of the Spirit, which means it isn't produced by us. We don't just muster up some self-discipline. Although it grows *within* a believer and is displayed in the life of a believer, its source is God. And so, Paul reminds us that the way to cultivate self-control is not to think much of ourselves nor to think much of Temptation but to think much of God! We grow in self-discipline as we grow in our relationship with God. He is the source of self-control.

And what better source could there be? Because, as verse 13 tells us **God is faithful** -- to Himself, to His word, and to His people. Paul points us back to the faithfulness of God as the source of our hope. Believers can have victory over temptation because our God is faithful!

So, how exactly does God's faithfulness help us in times of temptation? What is it God is faithful to do? Verse 13 tells us: In His sovereignty...

God [...] will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.

Do you hear that? Do you believe that? Let me read it again:

God [...] will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.

God sets limits upon the temptations that we face. As a believer, you will never be placed in a situation where giving into sin is inevitable. God will not allow it! So, when we do sin, it is not because God has given us more than we can handle. **God tempts no one to sin (Jas 1:13)**. No, we sin because we fail to utilize the weapons He has equipped us with. God's is sovereign over the temptations we face and He sets their limits.

We have an example of this in the book of Job. Remember how Satan wanted to test Job -- tempt him to curse God to His face? Although God allowed Satan to bring trials into Job's life, God also set their limits. With each round of testing, God told Satan how far he could go, and Satan could go no further.

Satan meant those tests to break Job's faith, but God intended them to build Job's faith. Isn't it reassuring to know that whatever temptations we face, God's purpose is not that we would be undone by them but that He would grow us through them! And so, in His wise and loving care for us...

He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able.

Okay, so how does God do that? How does He ensure the temptation we face isn't more than we can handle? Well, Paul tells us that too:

"With the temptation, He provides the way of escape also."

"Oh good! You mean, God provides a way for me to escape the temptation?" No, that's not what verse 13 says. It says, God provides the way of escape... ***"so that you will be able to endure [the temptation]."***

Well, wait a minute... if I am to endure the temptation, then what is this "escape" God provides? Escape from what? God provides escape from defeat. He provides the means to endure the temptation without falling prey to sin.

Remember how Paul prayed for the thorn in his flesh to be removed? God answered, NOT by taking the thorn away, but by giving Paul sufficient grace to endure it so that His strength working in Paul's weakness might be displayed. As you and I face temptation, God displays the

magnitude of His power, not by delivering us from the temptation, but by delivering us through it. ***God provides the way of escape that we will be able to endure it.***

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Robert Gromacki points out the word for "escape" (*ekbasin*) is closely related to the words used in Acts 27 verses 18 and 38 to describe sailors lightening their ship in the midst of a storm by throwing weighty cargo overboard. (*Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 123-124)

I like the image that presents to us: In order to endure the storm of temptation and not be sunk by it, we need to discern what in our lives needs to be cast off... thrown away. What in your life is putting you in danger of spiritual shipwreck? What do you need to jettison to keep from being sunk? Is it your TV? Your computer? Your phone? Certain acquaintances? Whatever it is, throw it overboard! As Christ warns us, pluck out the eye and cut off the hand that causes you to stumble! Those warnings are part of God's means of escape for you.

And notice, God provides the way of escape, not *a* way -- not one option among many for you to consider. He is the only source of what we need to persevere, to endure. Which is why we need to run to Him.

And the means by which we draw near to God is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Fittingly, **Hebrews 2:18** says of Jesus...

¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

And again in **4:15-16**...

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

When faced with temptation, we need to draw near to God and His throne of grace. Jesus is the power source that our self-control is fueled by.

And yet, running to God is only half of the equation Paul gives us. The second half is found in verse 14...

"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."

That's our second practice to implement. First was the practice of running to God, and second is...

4. The Practice of Running from Idolatry (v. 14)

Every time we sin it is because, in that moment, something else has captivated our hearts. Something else has become more desirable to us than God. We're convinced that there is something other than Christ we have to have, and so we are willing to sin to get it or we will sin in protest if it is withheld from us. In that way, all of our sin ultimately flows out of idolatry -- out of some misplaced worship.

But now, in verse 13 Paul said that God's way of escape was not that we would avoid temptation, but that we would be able to endure it. And yet, now he tells us to "flee from idolatry." So, which is it? Are we to endure or are we to flee? Is Paul contradicting himself here? No, not at all. There is a great difference between enduring in the midst of circumstances we cannot avoid and willfully putting ourselves in the path of temptation.

When Paul says that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, that promise is not an invitation for us to therefore flirt with temptation! If we do that, we are already ignoring one of the greatest means of assistance God has given us -- the warnings contained in His word! Remember, God has provided us the example of Israel so we would learn from it and not make the same mistakes they did.

The problem with some of the members of the Corinthian church that Paul was writing to here is that they were putting themselves in jeopardy through their association with idolatry. We must not do that! We must not put God to the test by dabbling in worldliness while expecting Him to keep us from falling! We are called to be wise, not foolhardy. If you are dancing on the edge of what is allowable, don't be surprised when you fall.

God's commands, and the examples He gives us in His word are means of His grace by which we can escape temptation by not entering into it in the first place! Fleeing idolatry shows we are taking His warnings about sin seriously. The Corinthians had failed to do that. They were carelessly exposing themselves to the influence of idolatry.

Now, again, we may be tempted to think this command to flee idolatry is a bit obvious and even unnecessary. I mean, if I'm running to God doesn't that automatically mean I will be running from idols? That question highlights one of the most dangerous misconceptions about idolatry: That idolatry is a conscious choice between either serving God or serving something else. But

idolatry is described in both the Old and New Testaments as spiritual adultery. And, in adultery, a person doesn't typically give up their spouse, they simply add another lover. And so it is with idolatry.

Kent Hughes rightly observes...

"Idolatry isn't a choice between two gods; it is the attempt to serve many gods at the same time." (Hughes, 1 Corinthians, pg. 184)

We don't consciously choose to worship something *instead of* Christ, we get drawn into worshiping things *along side of* Christ. This is why Jesus had to tell people...

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."
(Matthew 6:24)

He had to tell people they cannot serve two masters because the lie of idolatry tells us we can! The lie of idolatry says that as long as we love Jesus it doesn't matter if we live for other things. But the first commandment is, ***"You shall have no other gods beside Me."*** (Exodus 20:3) -- *along side of Me... in addition to Me.*

Like the Corinthians, we need to be warned: our God is a jealous God who will not share our devotion with anything. We cannot live for God and health. We cannot live for God and wealth. We cannot live for God and sex. We cannot live for God and reputation. We cannot live for God and our children. We cannot live for God and anything else, because whatever we elevate to be alongside of God robs Him of His glory!

Christians who stray down that path end up leading a double-life -- one in which they *profess* faithfulness to God, but have hidden lovers on the side. That is why **James 4:4** warns...

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

James is warning us of the dangers of idolatry. And like Paul, he's telling us that the problem of sin begins with what we worship.

One of the reasons we often struggle to have self-control is that we treat sin as a behavior problem rather than a worship problem. We tend to think in terms of, "I just need to stop doing this, or start doing that. I just need to try harder." But the root of sin goes much deeper than our behavior. It begins with what we are treasuring in our hearts -- what we are living for, what we worship!

If there is an area in your life where you habitually lack self-control ask yourself, "What is it that my heart is devoted to that makes this temptation so hard to face? What idolatrous love is being exposing in my heart through this temptation?" Until that thing is put in its proper place in your heart you will never experience the change that Christ longs for you to have.

Self-control is a matter of worship. That is why we have to run from idolatry and run to God. And because self-control is a matter of worship, the promises of God in this passage are not for everyone. His promises to limit the extent of our temptation and to provide a means of escape are promises made only to believers. We can only lay hold of these promises if we have a relationship with God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

These are promises made to God's people and made for God's glory. God produces the Spiritual Fruit of self-control in His people so that others will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16). And so, while our temptations may be "common to man", our responses should not be. When Christians respond to common temptations in uncommon ways, God's power is displayed in the lives of His people. And that brings Him honor! Our self-control is a means for God to receive glory and praise.

Remember that when someone brings up the topic of New Year's resolutions. Share with them how Jesus has not only changed your behavior, but how He has done so by giving you a new heart. A heart driven by new affections, new motives and new desires.

Now, be honest with people about the struggles you still face. But share with them how your are trusting God to help you in your day to day battles against sin and temptation. And that while you place no confidence in your own power or ability, you have every confidence in Jesus who faced every temptation victoriously and gave His perfect life to rescue sinners from both the penalty AND the power of sin. Tell them that no temptation you will ever face will be greater than Jesus' ability to deliver you through it.

Don't miss that opportunity to point people to Jesus as the only One who can change us in any way that really matters.