

THE NEED FOR SELF-CONTROL

“He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come...” —ACTS 24:24-25

Many Christians talk about being ‘Spirit-controlled’ rather than ‘self-controlled’, but the New Testament never speaks about being controlled by the Spirit. Some Bible versions translate ‘in the Spirit’ as ‘controlled by the Spirit’. If, by that, they mean the origin of our good behaviour is the work of the Spirit within us, then it may be legitimate to say we are ‘controlled by the Spirit’, but we are never out of control of ourselves.

It would be wonderfully simple and easy if we were controlled by the Spirit like a sort of battery operated vehicle, steering all our actions while we remain in a relaxed neutral position. But this isn’t the case. The fruit of the Spirit includes the ability to control ourselves. When Paul preached to the Roman Governor, Felix, he discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. There is a logical development in these three points. The righteousness of God is imparted to us through Christ, but is worked out practically in disciplined self-control, which prepares us for the judgment. Many people, however, want a righteous standing before God, but with a neat little side step of the need for self-control.

It is important to understand the discipline involved is not about working holiness into our lives, but about working out the holiness of God, which He has imparted to us. In other words, we work out in self-controlled discipline what God has already worked in us. Having all we need

through Christ's indwelling presence, we are to make every effort to produce the very things Paul calls in Galatians, "the fruit of the Spirit". The Holy Spirit creates both the appetite and the means for effective godly living. His internal work is the cause of our external behaviour, but its outworking is through our disciplined self-control as we behave in consistency with what God has placed in us.

This brings together the two most important ingredients of Christian living; obedience to God and dependence on Him. Dependence on God makes possible what He has called us to do, and this, in turn, makes obedience possible. The internal working of the Holy Spirit to produce His righteousness in us is expressed in part by our self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, not of our determination. And the key to attaining self-control is not to look at our own initiative and discipline, but to look to the Holy Spirit indwelling and filling our lives.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for your indwelling Spirit. May He fill me to overflowing so that self-control is a non-issue in my life.

TO REFLECT UPON: In difficult situations, am I exercising self-control?