

... and Self-Control

As a high school student active in the school concert band, I travelled with with the band as a clarinet player. On one spring bus trip, the band leader, who was also the orchestra conductor, was lamenting the fact that he had no string bass player for the orchestra in the fall term. He turned to me asked jokingly, "You wouldn't be interesting in learning to play the bass would you?" To his surprise, I said yes.

However, I would not be ready to play the bass in the orchestra right away because I could not control the instrument well enough without taking lessons first. After several months of taking lessons and practising, I learned to control the bass by controlling my own muscle movements. By September my control of the bass was sufficient, and I joined the orchestra.

As a member of the orchestra, I kept control of my instrument but yielded control of the performance of the music to the conductor by obeying his every command, as did the other members of the orchestra, so that the orchestra sounded the way the conductor wanted it to sound. The less control the members of the orchestra had over their own instruments, the less control the conductor had over the end result. As the orchestra practised and as the members gained more control of their instruments, the conductor gained more control of the orchestra's sound.

The orchestra is a beautiful picture of the Christian life. As the Spirit works to produce His fruit in our lives as seen in Galatians 5:22-23, the result will include self-control. (Do not confuse self-control with self-will. Self-will produces that horrible list of the works of the flesh listed earlier in Galatians 5:19-21, which include such things as: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, as well some of the more obvious sins of immorality, etc. There is a conflict between *self-will* and the work of the Holy Spirit, but there is no conflict between *self-control* and the work of the Holy Spirit, because true self-control is a work of the Spirit.)

The more the fruit of the Spirit is manifested in our lives with the resulting self-control, the more effectively we can offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, as it says in Romans 6:13:

(NIV Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.)

Some sincere believers insist that self-control is something that should be forsaken in favour of letting the Spirit take over, as if failing to exhibit part of the fruit that the Spirit produces in our life is a work of the Spirit. That can never be! We never come under more influence of the Holy Spirit by rejecting part of the fruit He produces in our lives. The Spirit never works against His own ministry. There is never a time and/or place where the fruit of the Spirit does not apply.

Those who believe that failing to exercise self-control is a work of the Spirit sometimes fall victim to self-deception, or worse, to demonic deception and believe that they are doing God a service by yielding to a spirit who makes them do strange and disruptive things in public services. Whether the spirit to whom they yield is their own spirit or a foreign spirit may be unclear, but it is certainly not the Holy Spirit, since everything the Holy Spirit does will be consistent with His work in us, including self-control.

In an orchestra, if a member insisted that he take his hands off of his instrument and let the conductor do what he wanted with it, the conductor would be upset with that member because the conductor wants the member to control his own instrument under the direction of the conductor. The conductor always works through those who play the instruments. To please the conductor, the member must take as much control of his instrument as possible. (Conductors are forever encouraging orchestra members to practise!).

If we are controlled by the Spirit, our self-control is enhanced rather than eliminated. If we grasp this biblical concept, a lot of nonsense is eliminated. If we live according to the work of the Spirit in our lives, we will not lose control of our ability to stand; we will not fall on the floor and call it being slain in the spirit; we will not bark like a dog and call it a manifestation of the Spirit; will not slur our speech and let our legs go rubbery and call it being drunk in the spirit and we will not give up control of our tongues and mistakenly call it the biblical gift of tongues.

To give up control of our bodies or thought processes is both unbiblical and dangerous. If we release control of our minds and/or bodies to a spirit who we mistakenly believe to be the Holy Spirit, the result will not be a product of the Holy Spirit. He never produces manifestations in us that are contrary to His work in us.

To reject the self-control that the Spirit works so hard to produce in us is to reject the work of the Spirit in our lives. If we reject what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives, we should not think it strange when another spirit, which is not holy, takes over our bodies and creates confusion and foolishness.

It is a dangerous thing to reject the Spirit's fruit in our lives and turn to a substitute spirit and take whatever kind of fruit that spirit brings. As we contemplate the work of the Spirit in producing fruit in our lives, let's take special note of the way the description of the fruit of the Spirit ends: "The fruit of the spirit is ... self-control."

Note:

NIV Galatians 5:19-23 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

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