

Title: Self-control
Date: November 21, 2021
Subject: Thanksgiving Travels – followers of Christ are to exhibit self-control
Scripture: Titus 1:8, 12; 2:2 - 8, 11, 12

Jean tell the story of Sophie, our middle granddaughter, who turned 4 the end of September. She recently greeted her mom Tiffani at her bedroom door. She told her “I’m sorry.” She’d broken a candle that was on the dining room table. Dad Mark was busy sweeping up the broken glass from the shattered candle. They asked Sophie what she was supposed to be learning. She slumped her shoulders and said, “self-control.”

Sophie isn't the only one who needs to learn self-control. All of us do. Scripture informs us the last days will be characterized by people who exhibit all sorts of godlessness (2 Timothy 3:1 - 5). Much of it reads like the opposite of what we've been discovering in the book of Titus. Tucked among those traits is being without self-control. Desiring to not be like the world at its worst is another reason to focus on the subject.

You might find the timing a bit odd to have a sermon on self-control just days before Thanksgiving since it’s also “National Pig Out Day.” I hadn’t put two and two together when I laid out the topics for our series Thanksgiving Travels with Titus that self-control would land on this day. It doesn't bother me too much as our family celebrated Thanksgiving on Friday...so the past is past and... self-control for thee and not for me.

There are some who suggest the method of self-control when it comes to Thanksgiving is to only use one plate...just make sure it's platter sized. Even if we do eat more in one day, don't make it a habit. Most know the feeling when eaten way too much on Thanksgiving Day -- moaning, groaning, bloated feeling, reaching for Tums for the tummy. Seriously, I was a good boy. . .

I also exhibited self-control leading up to our celebration. Jean sent me to the store Friday morning to get chicken broth for when she’d warm up the turkey to keep it moist because she’d made two turkeys the day before. Wanted to make sure there was plenty to eat and leftovers for everyone. I got to the checkout stand and saw it -- the cart of day-old donuts. They looked so good...but I convinced myself I didn't need them since we were going to have a breakfast spread, the main meal, other snacks and desserts. I told grandson Gabey about the donuts. He thought I should have bought them because he doesn’t like pie or cheesecake.

Just as the idea of “good” plays an important role in the book of Titus, so the concept of self-control is another key to unlocking the book. Six times words from the original language are used that refer to self-control and in a broader way than we often think. Those words denote the idea of having a sound mind, sober mindedness, sensible, discreet, prudent, giving thoughtful care to words and conduct, balance, moderation, restraint, free from the influence of intoxicants, being unclouded by outside influences, self-denial, “the inner strength to control one’s desires and actions” (NIV Study Bible note, Titus 1:8). Self-control.

I'm going to exhibit a little bit of self-control by not going back to where we've started each of the three previous weeks – 1:1 -- even though it's possible to weave it into a message on self-control. We'll begin with a people group who didn't exhibit self-control.

READ 1:12. The Cretans serve as a negative example. They were lazy. They operated by what felt good. Nap time anytime. Don't need to work. It's so hard. They didn't act in productive ways.

They were gluttons. According to Christianity.com, “Gluttony is defined as the over-indulgence or lack of self-restraint in food, drink, or wealth items, especially as status tokens. The English word comes from the Latin and means “to gulp.” Gluttony worships food to feed our own self-love” (christianity.com/wiki/sin/what-is-the-sin-of-gluttony-its-definition-and-consequences).

The elite class of the Roman Empire was known for lavish banquets lasting as long as 10 hours. The menu included rare and exotic items like flamingo tongue and snails stuffed with caviar. They ate and ate and ate. Thankfully, the idea they forced themselves to throw up so they could eat more has been found to be a myth...but it helped form the image of excessive and wasteful eating. The Cretans seemed to follow the Empire's lead and were known for their habit of overindulging. They probably were proud of their see food diet – if you see it, eat it.

They were liars. They didn't control their tongues. They didn't speak the truth. They were evil brutes. They were arrogant and domineering. Life was about themselves and they made sure others understood that.

Don't imitate the Cretans.

There are 5 people groups who are instructed to exercise self-control. The bulk are in the passage read earlier. We'll come back to that in a moment. There's also a long list of qualities for spiritual leaders of the church. We'll see this people group indirectly as almost everything in that list is repeated in the other groups. First, we're going to skip to the people group known as “everybody.”
Everybody READ 2:11, 12.

This is us, the people who've place their trust and confidence in Christ as the one and only way to gain a right relationship with God, freedom from the penalty of sin and the promise of eternal life in heaven. The knowledge of the grace of God has been displayed through Jesus Christ. He gave his life so we wouldn't have to die for our sins.

This leads to ongoing transformation. It involves saying “no” and saying “yes.” The arena is temptation and living according to the ways of the world system opposed to God. Offers to sin made to followers of Jesus Christ can be very appealing. The devil doesn't waste his time using unattractive lures. What would he hope to gain by doing that? He only uses bait that appeals to our senses, our desire to stroke our ego, our felt needs, to boost our enjoyment of something that's pleasurable. At least, that's what he says is behind the offer. The world system wants to have those who claim Christ as Savior join them in being ungodly, in acting, thinking and speaking in ways contrary to God's desires and principles.

Self-control enters the picture. Do we say “no” or “yes” to ungodliness? Do we stand firm against the ways of the world or not? Do we flee from temptation and run to Jesus or flee from Jesus and run to the sin?

We aren't left to our own wits and devices. The grace of God teaches us. We're students. We're lifelong learners as we don't complete the process of becoming more Christ-like until the day we go to heaven.

How does God teach us? The main way is through his Word. It tells us how we can please God, how we can live “live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” He provides the information but also the ability to exercise self-control.

We also learn through our experiences. It's kind of like the guy who was looking for a job. The first thing he was asked was if he had any experience. He said, “No. How do I gain experience?” He was told, “By working.” Need to have experience to get a job but need to have a job to gain experience. A vicious circle....

It can be that way for us. We gain experience through the things we experience. If it's from giving in to temptation, hopefully we learn to say “no” the next time temptation comes. If we do sin we have an advocate with the Father. Jesus presents the case stating he's paid for that sin. We have to repent, agree with God that what we did was sin and accept his forgiveness.

We go back to the passage read earlier and find more people groups. Even though there are specific applications of self-control to each of these groups, the areas are beneficial to all people. Having said that, we'll still see why each specific age group needs to be self-controlled.

2:2. Older men. There are two references connected with self-control. The first is the word “temperate” which has the meaning of being free from the influence of intoxicants. The other is “self-controlled.”

We'd expect older people to have learned a lot through their years and they'd exhibit self-control because of the positive and negative things they've experienced. But there's still the instruction to be self-controlled. Some feel that since they're older, they should be free from restraints. Not the case. They should have navigated through life to the point they don't get into some of the messes they did when they were younger and lacked self-control, when they were learning self-control. Hopefully, they give more care to their words and to actions.

They're to be sound in faith, love and endurance. They don't chase after foolish controversies and strange teachings. They don't have itching ears or wander down some rabbit hole of teaching. They're the opposite of the Cretans who were known as liars who peddled false teaching. They're to be responsible and sensible moral and spiritual examples.

Next up is older women. 2:3. They aren't explicitly told to exercise self-control. However, the character traits they're to express certainly include the concept. They're to be reverent. Some translations expand by adding it's what's fitting for holiness. They're to match their character to that of Christ who's inside them.

Ellicott comments on the Greek word expressed in the phrase “the way they live.” It “includes dress, appearance, conversation, manner; includes an outward deportment dependent on something more internal.

The elder Christian woman in her whole bearing should exhibit a certain dignity of sacred demeanour” (Ellicott’s Commentary, Titus 2:3). It applies to the entirety of the person.

Not slanderers. The word is diabolous from which we get our English word diabolical. It speaks of a connection to the devil as the accuser. What follower of Christ really wants to be diabolical, to be like the devil? It happens when people become critical, judgmental, use their words to bitterly rip into another person, to belittle. Exercise self-control in what is said and what is left unsaid, and the way we express it. We don't need speak everything we think.

This is connected with what’s directed to elders in chapter 1 (v. 7) – not quick-tempered, not violent. Don’t be a seething volcano ready to explode at the drop of a hat. Don’t be contentious, having a chip on the shoulder daring and hoping somebody will try to knock it off. Control anger and emotions.

Not addicted to much wine. Matthew Poole's Commentary: “Greek, not serving much wine; for those that frequent the tap too much, are ordinarily enslaved to it.” The instruction is also given about elders of the church (Titus 1:7; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8).

One of our neighbors recently died. He had a long history of addiction to alcohol. He’d go into treatment and sometimes check himself out before it was scheduled to end and soon would be back to drinking heavily. The most recent experience was he was released after a 28 day stay and went back to drinking the same day till he got drunk. He’d previously told one of our other neighbors that he’d be driving by a store and he’d hear the booze calling to him to come and get a bottle. It takes a horrible toll.

Followers of Christ are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit not by other substances.

Teach what is good. Self-control is exercised in sticking with the truth. Those in the position of spiritual authority in the church are to love what is good, hold firmly to the truth. All are to be devoted to the good.

The rationale for older women behaving this way is so they can train younger women.

This brings us to the next people group - younger women. The main focus of their lives is to love their family, their husbands and children. Obviously, it means not to hate one’s family. Self-control enters the picture in v. 5 and is connected with purity referring to innocence and modesty of speech, dress and action.

There are sad stories about young women and men and older women and men giving their love to someone who's not their husband or wife or children, no longer remaining pure. It often starts with thinking about how nice it’d be in a different situation. Later their passions become inflamed. I recently heard a story of a man whose wife left him and their children because she claimed she was in love with a woman. The man and kids were heart broken and struggled. It caused him to leave the ministry.

The motivation for young women to act with self-control is so people won't be able to malign the word of God. They won't be able to attack it and say all sorts of vicious things about it.

There are times when lack of self-control can be humorous. When I had an endoscopy and colonoscopy in one session in the procedure room, Jean and daughter Tiff were there to witness the coming out from under anesthesia. I had trouble walking and I talked, talked, talked, repeating myself. They mentioned

stopping at Culver's to get something to eat. I told them, "Go ahead and splurge" and repeatedly said I couldn't eat anything greasy or gassy. I had my hand out the window as Jean drove on 41 thinking all the while I was driving. That's messed up.

What's more messed up is when Christians lack self-control and cause the name of Christ to be defamed. There's nothing funny about it.

Young men. 2:6. Some may think younger men get off easy. They're simply being "encouraged." Is Scripture giving a wink and a nod at them, allowing them to do whatever they want until they hit a certain age and are expected to grow up like is the situation in some cultures? Not the case. Maybe it's blunt without elaboration because it's obvious young men need self-control in every area – mind, body, attitudes, speech, thoughts, and any possible area not covered by those. Though there aren't direct amplifications of self-control to young men, there's the example Titus is to set by doing good, not evil.

Self-control can be tough. There's the story of a man in a grocery store who kept meeting the same shopper aisle after aisle - a dad with an uncooperative three-year-old boy in the cart. The first time they passed, the boy was asking over and over for a candy bar. The man heard the dad say, "Now, Billy, this won't take long." In the next aisle, the kid's pleas had gotten louder. The dad quietly said, "Billy, just calm down. We'll be done in a minute." By the time they got to the dairy case, the kid was screaming uncontrollably with dad still keeping his cool. In a low voice he was saying, "Billy, settle down. We're almost out of here." The dad and son reached the checkout just ahead of the man. The boy was screaming and kicking. Dad was maintaining control, calmly saying over and over, "Billy, we'll be in the car in a minute and then everything will be OK." The observer was impressed and amazed. After paying for his groceries, he caught up with the pair in the parking lot to hear: "Billy, we're done. It's going to be OK." He tapped the father on the shoulder, "Sir, I couldn't help but watch how you handled little Billy. You were amazing." The dad replied, "You don't get it, do you? I'm Billy!"

People can control themselves when they want to. Think of people who are profane and vulgar but when they go on TV as part of their job or to be interviewed, they can control their language.

Let's end by talking more about food. Apparently, there's a saying that goes: "Next time you want a cupcake, eat a carrot." Herbert Vander Lugt wrote about that adage: "The saying is good advice for dieters, but those who framed it may have had all of us in mind. By disciplining our desires when no moral principle is at stake, we prepare ourselves for those moments when we face a temptation to sin...We need this reminder today. Many people think they can live immorally now and suddenly stop when they want to. Because they do not consider the addictive power of sin, they find that living up to their good intentions is far more difficult than they had anticipated. Proverbs 25:28 tells us that if we lack self-control we are as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls. Consistent self-discipline will build up our spiritual defense system against the forces of evil. When we discipline ourselves to keep our ordinary desires under control, we make a habit of virtuous living and practice the reality of Paul's words in Romans 6:18, "Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."