

Text: Gal. 5:23

Title: "The fruit of the Spirit in the life of Christ – temperance"

Time: 10/13/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The Ironman Triathlon is a three-part race that begins with a 2.4 mile swim, followed by a 112 mile bike ride, and ending with a 26.22 mile run.

At ironman.com you can learn about their recommended 6-month training plan if you want to participate in one of these races (I decided against the idea). Step one is get a good swim coach who can make sure your swimming technique is sound. Then you need to get a bike professionally fitted to you, so that you can optimize your speed during the biking leg.

Then comes the conditioning regimen. The plan calls for a strict schedule six-months out that includes on Monday, a 1 hour swim, on Tuesday, a 1 hour bike ride, on Wednesday, a rest day, on Thursday, a 1 hour run, on Friday, a 1 hour swim, on Saturday, a 1 hour run, and on Sunday 2-3 hours on the bike again.

That is the easy month, and things ramp up from there. Then I noticed the note that said that the plan suggested will not necessarily help you to win the race; it will just get you to the finish line alive.

We have come to the last of the fruits of the Spirit in our study of the life of Christ, *temperance*. I begin with a description of the discipline necessary for the ironman race, because Paul explains what this virtue of temperance is with a similar illustration from the world of sports (1 Cor. 9:25).

Notice that this verse tells us how the spiritual discipline of temperance is the same as an athlete's physical discipline of temperance. Both the Christian and the athlete should be

striving for the mastery, and this will require that both are temperate in all things. But then Paul also mentions a difference: “they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”

As the next few verses explain, temperance is simply the ability to control the appetites and emotions of our body for a greater good (vv. 26-27). In 1 Cor. 7:9, Paul uses the word to encourage those who cannot control their God-given sexual desire for someone to go ahead and marry, and in the Greek translation of Gen. 43:31, the word is used for the way Joseph made himself stop crying so that he could continue the interview with his brothers.

The Greek word literally means *in strength*, and it refers to the ability to make choices based on an inner strength instead of on the urges of natural appetites like hunger, taste, thirst, comfort, rest/sleep, sexual desire, humor, entertainment, and companionship. Temperance is disciplined self-control.

Now as we might gather from Paul’s comments to these Corinthians about temperance, it was a virtue highly esteemed in Greek culture. But the Greek virtue of temperance is very different from the biblical virtue of temperance in three important ways:

1. Greek self-control was a tool of personal, self-governing freedom; biblical self-control is a tool of greater servitude for Christ (In Acts 24:25, Felix is uncomfortable with Paul’s coupling temperance with God’s righteousness and God’s judgment).
2. Greek self-control often viewed the natural appetites as intrinsically evil, and so it often led to some form of asceticism – the idea that celibacy is more spiritual than marriage, for example; biblical self-control understands that the appetites of life are created by God for a good purpose,

and so it is not ascetic when it comes to these, but purposeful.

3. Greek self-control was meritorious with the gods – temperate people could earn favor with heaven; biblical self-control is a fruit of the Spirit born through His power in those who are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our merit rests in Christ's temperance, not our own. His temperance was perfect; ours has not been.

This morning I want to see from an account of His childhood three ways in which Jesus Christ was the perfect example for us of biblical temperance.

I. His temperance made Him a diligent student of Scripture (Luke 2:39-47).

Illustration: Maureen and I had the privilege of attending the Baptist Church of Danbury, CT for the first 11 years of our marriage. One of the nice things about attending church there, and there were many, was that the building we met in still had three beautiful Tiffany stained-glass windows adorning its platform.

Behind the platform, right in the center over the baptistry, the window depicts a twelve-year-old Christ surrounded by older gray-bearded rabbis who are listening intently to His interpretation of the Bible. I can think of no better image to reflect upon prior to hearing the preaching of the Word than that.

Application: Jesus demonstrated His self-control and discipline as a student of the Scripture, and if we want to bear this fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we will need to see our need for the Spirit's help to do the same. Note a few specifics with me here about Jesus' disciplined approach to Scripture:

1. He was 12 years old (v. 42). Where are our 12-year-old Bible theologians today? I can show you the 12-year-old prodigy in music, in art, in technology, in sports, and in spelling bees. What about those who have disciplined themselves to study the Scripture? Paul said to a younger Timothy, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." Whether 12 or 102, it takes discipline to read your Bible faithfully. To rightly divide the Word of truth, we must be disciplined workmen, and we will need the help of God's Spirit. We can ask for that help whenever we read the Bible.
2. He sought discussion with Bible teachers beyond his mom and dad (v. 43). I am sure that Jesus learned much from Joseph and Mary about His Bible, but He also recognized the importance of the instruction of teachers God had placed in His life to better understand the Word of God. Whatever natural inhibition He might have experienced that would have prevented this He overcame with temperance by the power of God's Spirit in His life.
3. He not only learned, but His learning was in preparation for teaching (v. 47). The reason we must learn God's Word well is that God wants us to teach it well. Luke makes this point to Jerusalem believers as he desires to discuss Melchizedek with them (Heb. 5:11-14). These believers were dull of hearing because they did not have the self-control necessary to be sharp.

Do you and I have the self-control necessary to study the Bible the way we ought to? I know that this is a great need in my own life. The unread books on my shelf that would help me be a better Bible student are multitudinous. How can we be more disciplined about learning the Scripture? Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Temperance can

come through His power in our lives, if we confess our sin and run in the truth.

II. His temperance made Him busy with His Father's business (Luke 2:48-52).

Illustration: It is a great joy for a father to have his son work with him in business. That plan does not always work, but sometimes it does. I found a list of companies that were passed successfully from a father to his son(s): SC Johnson, Perdue Farms, Comcast, Koch Industries, Love's Travel Stops and Stores, Mars, and Wal-Mart.

Application: If you were to ask one of Jesus's neighbor's in Nazareth what His father's business was, that neighbor probably would have said carpentry. Notice that Jesus refers to something other than carpentry when He calls what He was doing "My Father's business."

Like the Lord Jesus, every believer has a human father and a Heavenly Father. Sometimes the business of the human father can be at odds with the business of the heavenly Father. That is certainly what happened on this occasion for Jesus, and Jesus picked the business of His heavenly Father. There is a mild rebuke in His response to Mary's question, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, *thy father* and I have sought thee sorrowing" (v. 48). Jesus reminds Mary about His other Father.

What was the business of His heavenly Father for Jesus? It was to seek and to save those who are lost. As a 12-year-old, it was to prepare to be a rabbi himself, to learn how to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. As a child and as an adult, it was to lead a sinless life and to die on the cross for our sins. Carpentry had little to do with His heavenly Father's business.

What is the business of our Heavenly Father for you and me and our believing children? It is to seek and to save the lost. It is to make disciples of the nations and to be faithful local church members as Jesus builds His church. Being a good family member and a good citizen play their part in this heavenly business (vv. 51-52). But our heavenly Father's business for us today is the disciple-making ministry of the local church.

Does it take discipline and self-control to be busy about this business? You bet. Where does that discipline come from? It comes from the power of God's Spirit in our lives – confession of sin and submission to His truth.

III. His temperance made Him resist temptation to disobey (Luke 4:1-13).

Application: Those final words in verse 13, "for a season," are important to our understanding of what it meant for Christ to face temptation as a perfect man. We sometimes think that it must have been an easy thing for Him to do so because He was so perfect, but His perfection must have made temptation more intense for Him than it has ever been for us. In our lives, temptation stops when we succumb to it in sin. What once tempted us then condemns us instead, and shame and guilt take the place of attraction and deception. Temptation stops.

But Jesus never succumbed to temptation, so for Him it never ended. We certainly see our Lord master His human appetites in this passage. God promises, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Jesus always found that way of escape. He did so through the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 1) and God's Word.

That way of escape is available to us when we face temptation, and through it we can have the self-control to resist our appetites and choose to do the right thing through the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. If we walk in the Spirit, we will have temperance to in no way fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This is God's promise.

Conclusion: Day in and day out, throughout His entire life, Jesus controls His hunger, thirst, desire for comfort, rest/sleep, sexual attraction, humor, entertainment, and companionship in the cause of a greater good. Phil. 2:6-8 tells us about that greater good – obedience unto death, even death on the cross, to save sinners like you and like me.

Isaac Watts wrote the hymn, "When I survey the wondrous cross." Rather than a Tiffany window depicting Christ in the temple with the rabbis, we have a simple cross at the front of our room. The cross is Jesus' greatest work of temperance.

His richest gain, He counted but loss, for this one goal – to save you and me. And so the song rightly challenges us to respond with a similar Spirit-filled self-control: "My richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my pride." "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, and my all." Have we given him those things through the power of God's Spirit bearing in us the fruit of Christlike temperance?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*