

**“Living in the ‘World of Me’”
 “Christ or Convenience?
 The Gift of Self-control”**

**1 Thessalonians 5:8 (NIV)
 1/31/10**

Self-control is much more than behavior modification. It is about blossoming into a beautiful life in Christ. The only problem? It’s inconvenient.

This morning we begin a three week series I am calling, “Living in the ‘World of Me’”. I probably don’t have to unpack the meaning there too much. At least in our culture, it has become the “world of me”: all about me, my needs, my desires, my dreams, my stuff, my feelings, yes, even “my” God.

So what do we do about it?

This morning we are going to hear about self-control—that it is so much more than just behavior modification, but truly living in Christ and blossoming into His image.

Next week we get beyond “Me” and ask ourselves who it is we are listening to in our lives.

Then finally, one aspect of living in the “world of me” is feeling like I must always have the upper hand in life, which influences our conversations with persons. So we will hear from God’s Word about the gift of silence—when not to speak.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (NIV)

“Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled.”

Ah. Self-control. Now be honest, what are the first thoughts or feelings you get when I say those words, “self-control”?

Maybe it’s thoughts like, “Don’t do this or that. Don’t eat that. Don’t watch that. Don’t say that.”

I can get caught in the typical images on self-control: living some extremely strict purist life, on my knees 24/7, depriving myself of everything fun and yummy in the world. I think we hear those words, self-control, and can kind of cringe.

My parents used to regularly tell me, “Control yourself!”

I see advertisements for certain movies and I think “that’s just something I am not supposed to do.”

I know for me, self-control can often just feel like behavior modification.

But is there more to it than simply “behaving”?

[YouTube Video—“Kids Marshmallow Experiment” 2:54]

How would you do? Maybe put a big fat burger in front of me and I wouldn’t do as well. In a longer version of this video, the one boy finally gets his second marshmallow and directly shoves both of them into his mouth.

Self-control.

Is that all it is? Or is there more to it than that?

Historically, if you were a Greek person, self-control would have been about mastering one’s self and your physical desires in order to create a well-rounded personality. Power over yourself.

But for the Christian, it goes much deeper.

Galatians 5:22-23: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*

Self-control is about the power of God.

It is a gift from God as we give ourselves over to Him.

Romans 6:6 says, *“We know that our old self was crucified with Jesus so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”*

Verse 13 says, *“No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”*

We are made new in Christ. Yes, you and I still have our earthly desires. We are always human after all. But:

Self-control is making the daily choice of who you are going to let use you: Your passions or God’s purposes.

Self-control is less about putting some restraining belt on, or walking around in a straight jacket, and more about which door you are going to open.

So what makes self-control a challenge for us?

Let’s look at Acts 24.

Paul has been arrested because some said he was *“a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”* They said *“he even tried to profane the temple,”* so they arrested him.

So now Paul is before Felix, the governor at Caesarea. Verse 22 says Felix was well acquainted with the Way.

Read verses 24-25 (NIV).

I love this account because I think it gets to the heart of our struggle with self-control. What did Felix say? *“When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”*

When it comes down to it:

Self-control is inconvenient.

If I like to eat, self-control at a pizza buffet is inconvenient.

If someone just made me really angry, using self-control and not telling them what I think about them is inconvenient.

Whatever weakness you relate to: anger, eating, TV, internet, shopping—Felix nailed it—self-control is inconvenient. It’s inconvenient because it doesn’t serve my desires.

Sometimes it’s just a flat-out bummer when the group is going this way and I must choose if I am going to take the godly way, because it’s inconvenient.

It’s easy many times just to go with the flow and let myself just be in the moment. That’s a big one for us these days, *“It’s okay. Just be in the moment and enjoy the experience. If it feels that good it can’t be that bad, right?”*

There’s the door again, the daily decision: Christ or convenience?

You see because that’s just it:

Self-control serves my needs, not my desires.

For what is it that I truly need in this world?

1 Thessalonians 5:8: *“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”*

1 Peter 4:7; 5:8: *“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”*

I need to be in a loving relationship with God. I need to pray. I need to be made whole by God's loving grace. I need to be in a loving relationship with others. I need to serve others. Not a whole lot of other things I need.

What would it be like to go through an entire year without purchasing anything new?

That's the question a small West Coast group of environmental activists asked themselves a year ago. At the beginning of 2006, ten friends declared a sabbatical from American consumerism. "The Compact"—as they lightheartedly called their agreement—bound them in a mutual pledge to abstain from shopping sprees and other trappings of modern culture. Other than food, essential toiletries, and other purchases that fell under the categories of health and safety, the friends purchased virtually nothing new—and they learned a lot about themselves in the process.

After going through a time of "retail withdrawal," they were amazed at how the items they needed just "showed up" as they shared and interacted with others. Twenty-six-year-old Rachel Kesel added: "I found that a lot of times there were things I thought I needed that I didn't need that much." Rediscovering the library and paying down credit cards were two of the unexpected dividends members of the group experienced.

Forty-two-year-old John Perry said, "One of the byproducts of The Compact is that I now have a completely different relationship with the things in my life. I appreciate the stuff I have more." Perry developed a knack for being able to fix things, rather than simply purchasing new replacement items.

The group enjoyed the freedom from their Compact so much that they have chosen to renew their pledges for 2007.

Associated Press, "Group Went on Shopping Sabbatical in '06," Houston Chronicle (1-3-07); submitted by Hugh Poland, Kingwood, Texas

Self-control is about freedom.

It's being freed from the slavery of yourself.

Read **Romans 7:15-19, 24-25 (NIV)**

So now I can think about self-control in a much deeper, spiritual way. It is one of the fruit of the Spirit because it really is a sweet blessing to us.

It's not about living in strict adherence to the law and perfect behavior, depriving ourselves of all things enjoyable in life.

Self-control is about giving ourselves every opportunity to live in the fullness of Christ—abundant, beautiful life that truly becomes a blessing to others.

When we daily open the door to Christ, we grow and blossom in Him. His fragrance is what pours out from us to bless others. Our self becomes God's—all the fruit of His Spirit that begins to transform the world around us.

Julio Diaz, a 31-year-old Bronx social worker, just wanted to do what he did every night on the way home from work: grab a quick bite to eat at his favorite diner. Only one thing stood in his way from doing just that—a mugger. When Diaz stepped off the train and onto the subway platform, a teenager ran up to him, pulled out a knife, and demanded Diaz hand over his wallet. Realizing it wasn't worth a fight, Diaz fished the wallet out of his pocket and gave it to the boy. Much to the mugger's surprise, Diaz decided to go the extra mile. As the teen ran away, Diaz called out, "If you're going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm."

The boy stopped in his tracks, shocked. Diaz explained that it was quite clear the teen needed money, so he told him to keep the wallet, take the coat, and if he wanted, grab a bite to eat with Diaz. The boy was too shocked to say no.

As the two ate dinner at Diaz's favorite diner, the teen marveled over how many dishwashers and waitresses offered Diaz a wave or a friendly word. He figured Diaz owned the place. When the boy shared his observation, Diaz smiled and said, "Haven't you been taught you should be nice to everybody?"

"Yeah," the teen replied, "but I didn't think people actually behaved that way." The two continued to talk about life and other matters. When the bill finally came, Diaz told the boy that he needed his wallet to pay. The boy handed it back over without thinking twice. Diaz paid for the meal and offered the teen \$20. He also asked that his would-be mugger surrender the knife—which he did.

When Diaz told his mother about the encounter, she said, "You're the type of kid that if someone asked you for the time, you [would give] them your watch."

Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; StoryCorps: Recording America, "A Victim Treats His Mugger Right," www.npr.org (3-28-08)

Self-control is making the daily choice of who you are going to let use you: Your passions or God's purposes. Remember, in Christ you belong to the day. Yes, living in the "world of me", it can be inconvenient. But it's just momentary. What God will do through you is eternal. Amen.