Self-Control  
Proverbs

Biblical self-control is the process of turning from giving power to the temporal that leads to destruction to being filled by the Holy Spirit, who leads us into godliness.

Today we continue our journey through our summer series in Proverbs. And today our topic is going to be Self Control. So if you want to go ahead and turn to Proverbs 25, we will pick up there in a few minutes...

The concept of self-control is one that is often misunderstood in the Scriptures. We know it is a fruit of the Spirit (and we will get to that passage in a little while), but the English word we use overstates what our own role is in terms of control, and can easily overlook the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So this morning, my goal is (1) take a look at the common uses of this term, (2) pick a topic where we can further explore the idea of self-control in the Book of Proverbs, and (3) identify the areas of our life that “snag” our walk with Jesus.

Read with me Proverbs 25:28
“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

As I said before, Proverbs often paints a picture of truth that in a way that we should be able to understand. It helps us visualize what is happening or could happen.

As we think back in terms of Near-Eastern kingdoms, it was crazy to assume that a city would be able to protect itself without walls. Roving bands and organized armies were always looking for easy battles - and to be without a first line of defense made you easy pickings in the land. This is pretty clearly seen in the book of Nehemiah, which is highlights the notion that Jerusalem had to rebuild its walls if they wanted to survive.

This passage illustrates for us the danger of trying to live our lives without self-control - that somehow we are vulnerable to the world around us. It seems, therefore, fairly important to understand the scope of meaning for this word.

- The term self-control in Hebrew is “masar”, which interestingly doesn’t really contain the idea of “self.” The word is better defined as something that “holds back, restrains or prevents.”

- Its counterpart in New testament Greek is the word is εγκράτεια, coming from the root - κράτος. The meaning has to do with “dominion” or “mastery”, and includes the idea of power coming from within, but not by oneself. It is also where we get our word democracy (δημος/κράτεια) - “power from the people.”

So it is important to understand that self-control is not a “positive force power” on the offensive, or some type of Marvel Comics super power that allows us to take on enemies by ourselves. Instead, it is the ability to trust in something other than our own innate strength, to restrain or prevent an external enemy.

In the western world, and even more so in the Texas world, we live by a bootstrap worldview - pulling ourselves up by our own power, which in the extreme extinguishes how the grace of God allows anyone to experience blessing.
Though maybe appropriate in some settings, “manning up” to a persistent problem in our spiritual life might not be the best strategy for success. Biblical self-control, by its very nature, includes the idea of God being part of the picture.

With this understanding, let’s see how the Book of Proverbs can shed more light on the idea of self-control.

**Extended Example: Dealing with Alcohol**

I really like the Book of Proverbs. It is one of those books of the Bible that causes me to slow down and think about what God’s word is trying to say and how it applies to me. I can’t just breeze through it like many familiar parts of the Bible. The Book of Proverbs forces introspection and reflection.

It has already been mentioned in a couple of sermons in this series that the book of Proverbs was written to help us learn “skill at living.” And part of the way that this is accomplished is to identify the roads that we are currently on, and show us where those roads ultimately leads.

**Proverbs:**
* helps us to identify the struggles of life, which are often portrayed as “traps”
* gives us a picture of our problem in a way that we can understand
* provides the sometimes missing link between cause and effect
* and often shows us the ultimate consequences of bad choices

So this morning I would like to take a look at the issue of self-control, but by using passages in the Book of Proverbs that address the use of alcohol as an example, to see what we can gain in regards to Self-Control.

**Story - Coolness in a Cup**

I brought a couple visual aids with me today (styro and solo cups). Now for one portion of the audience these cups merely represent family reunions, Sunday picnics and little league baseball games. For another portion, however, these might represent something else - Party Companions.

The Styro cup (for those of us that are older in the crowd, before we became environmentally aware) and the Solo cup are what we carried around parties to give us something to do with our hands, and to hold the beverage we thought was “liquid courage.”

But many of us, struggle with a similar issue on a daily basis. It may or may not be about alcohol. It could be eating, concern with weight, gambling, pornography, or a hundred other behaviors that lead to addictions.

We exchange the power to have our lives eternally changed, and give it to a temporal and failing strategies.

Now on the outset, because I’m not trying to cover the topic entirely, we should be really clear, where we can, about what the Bible says in regard to consuming alcohol:

* For an adult, there is no Scripture that prohibits public consumption, but for people under 21, there are no freedoms that allow you to consume alcohol publically or away from your parents.

So no matter the freedom you may “feel,” the Bible says to follow the law and the law says that your freedoms are restricted.
* Drinking in excess leads to drunkenness, which clearly crosses over what is okay Scripturally.

* For some, consuming alcohol is not a problem, but for others it is a slippery slope into a very dangerous set of consequences.
* The freedom to consume alcohol as a Christian should never be held above the damage it can do to others who have different views and different struggles.

* Drinking alcohol is a liberty that CAN be surrendered, but not a right to be demanded.

So what does Proverbs say about the consumption of Alcohol?

Proverbs 20:1
"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."

Here, alcohol is personified into the behaviors that are often associated with it:
* Mocker
A mocker is a person who UNDERMINES authority, becoming a nuisance and a hindrance to a person or an organization

* Brawler
A brawler is a person who ASSUMES authority, usually through aggression, ferocity, or physical strength

In this passage the Hebrew word for “wine” means wine, but the word for “strong drink” actually means something more like beer (product made from barley).
Does this mean that everyone who has a glass of wine or beer turns into obnoxious fighter? Of course not. This passage is talking about the person who turns over the control of their life (whether temporarily or habitually) to a secondary substance - causing them to become something they are not.

The issue isn't the nature of the beverage, but the choice of the person.

Alcohol is just a drink until:
* you give it power over you
* you want it to give you something it cannot
* you depend on it for escape

It isn’t that the drink itself is evil, but rather the circumstances and the behaviors that can follow that lead to sin. — Again, the same is true for food, sex, gambling, etc.

Listen how this issue of alcohol is coupled with and expanded to other ideas, and the progression that is made with each successive passage:

Proverbs 21:17
17 Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

This proverb extends the love of wine as part of an overall addiction to pleasure - having its greatest impact on the financial health of the person.

Proverbs 23:19-21
19 Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. 20 Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, 21 for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

Here the author extends the dangers of alcohol to being deceptive and addictive.
Proverbs 23:29-35
29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?
30 Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine.
31 Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.
32 In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.
33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things.
34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.
35 “They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake? I must have another drink.”

Woes, strife, complaints, wounds without cause, redness of eyes...

This stern warning states those who tarry (spend some time) with wine are caught into its snare, suffering from the consequences of giving up control of their lives to a thing that has no concern for their lives.

So what is the point? I think it is two-fold.

First, we, as the people of God, shouldn’t be turning over control of our lives to something that leads to foolishness at best, and addiction at worst.

Does that mean we shouldn’t drink alcohol? Well that isn’t an easy question to answer, and it isn’t one I can tell you. It is something you have to consider within our culture, within your family and within your circumstances (according to the principles I already gave).

Second, we, as the people of God should be turning control of our lives over to someone that leads to godliness (the Holy Spirit).

Ephesians 5 captures the heart of this lesson in a passage that isn’t always seen in light of its context. Read with me...

Ephesians 5:15-21
15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Debauchery (or dissipation in other versions) carries the idea of being a poor use of time, or luxurious wastefulness.

Paul urges us a believers to not be controlled by something a silly as alcohol (which leads to destruction), but rather to yield control of our lives to the only thing that can bring about godliness - being filled with the Holy Spirit. He tells us that the only lasting means of self-control comes through appropriating the power that is available to us through the Spirit-filled life.

Most of us have patterns of sin behaviors we have accrued in our lives. As we came to faith, we acknowledged that Jesus’ death on the cross broke the power of that sin and allowed us to receive God’s forgiveness. But so many people continue to cross back in to those patterns of sin because they have not
allowed the Holy Spirit to help them make choices that lead to godliness. And at the center of that choice is self-control - choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, empower us, and lead us into godliness.

This is the essence of Galatians 5. Paul states his premise in the very first verse:

5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Freedom has been offered, but freedom isn’t always taken. But that is contrary to the reason for which Christ set us free.

But Paul reiterates is point in 5:16.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

I find that when I talk with people, knowing the truth is effective, but they still get “snagged” in life because of things from their past. Like little boomerangs the issues that they once put away come circling back around, derailing them from the life that they want to live and enjoy in freedom.

This morning I think it would be helpful to hear from someone who has been through this process of seeing God work in their lives to overcome their history and experience freedom in Christ.

The Celebrate Recovery ministry at Grace Bible Church is serving in leadership to provide an environment where people can explore how Jesus offers us this promise of freedom.

I really like the tagline that is used by this powerful ministry. Celebrate Recovery categorizes these types of issues in life “Hurts, Habits, and Hang-ups.”

Hurts are an emotional reaction to another person’s behavior or to a disturbing situation such as abuse, abandonment, codependency, divorce, relationship issues, etc.

Habits are an addiction to someone or something. Examples include alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex, shopping, smoking, pornography, to name a few.

Hang-ups are negative mental attitudes that are used to cope with people experiencing adversity. Some examples include: anger, depression, fear, and unforgiveness.

Do any of these sound familiar to you? Probably so. How are you doing in being able to see that Jesus Christ has set you free from your old patterns of sin to live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit? Are your hurts, habits or hangups derailing you in the process of living in that freedom?

Take a look at the two lives described in the rest of Galatians 5.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Which of these lists best describes your life today? Which one would you rather choose?

As application today, I want to encourage you to be honest and brave about what is going on in your life. I’m confident that that many of you are frustrated by the lack of spiritual growth in your life, and constantly being
pulled back into the frustrating world of hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

My challenge to you is to do two things:

1. Understand that, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, He has set you free, not only from the **penalty** of sin, but also from the **power** that that sin holds over you.

2. But also understand that very few (if any) people can walk through this process without the help of others in their lives.

This is why we are to confess our sins before one another (James), are implored to live in the light (1 John), and to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians) - so that we can realize that this power has been broken.

I also want to let you know about Celebrate Recovery's normal meeting time:
They meet in gender and issue related groups every Tuesday night at 7pm, in the Southwood College Wing.

You don’t have to be nervous about attending - I can promise you they are one of the funnest groups we have at our church - they still know how to party! And just so you know, addictions are welcome, but they are not necessary for participation.
It is for freedom that Christ set us free. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit that allows us to stop giving control of our lives to things that bring destruction, and to give control of our lives to the Holy Spirit - who leads us into godliness.