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**Presentation Transcript**  
**True Spirituality 05 – Self-Control**  
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We're continuing our series on *True Spirituality* today. Today's presentation is about *Self-Control*. So far we've covered four aspects of spirituality. Some people today say that we don't have to keep the Law of God. Jesus said that justice, mercy and faith were the weightier matters of the Law. And these things are the core of spirituality and godliness.

We talked about, in our first message, *God Knows Best*. That was about poverty of the spirit, faith and repentance – all very spiritual topics. We talked about *Jesus Christ and the Law* – the relationship between the two of them. We covered things like faith, mercy, loving God, justice – all, as Jesus said, the weightier matters of the Law, and yet very spiritual topics. We talked about *Walking Worthy* in the third one. Walking worthy of Jesus Christ has to do with faith in Him and the love of God. We talked last time – for the fourth one – about the fact that *Life Is About Relationships*, not about all the things that a lot of us think are so important. Very important topics if we want to really get on the same page with God and off of our page.

Today we're going to talk about another one. We're going to talk about *Self-Control*, but we're going to cover it in a way you have likely never heard before at church. This is such a *huge* topic. We're not going to be able to cover it all, but we can at least point out a few things. This whole topic of self-control requires more effort. And maybe we will do that at some later time.

Let's go to Galatians 5, and verse 22, to look at something Paul said.

**Gal. 5:22** – *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law.* That means that it is a part of the Law, doesn't it? And he tells us that self-control was one of the fruits of the Spirit. To be a spiritually-minded person, then, this would be a part of it, wouldn't it? So it's a very spiritual topic.

So, how are you doing in this area? As we listen to this presentation, we can measure, or examine ourselves, to see. Let's go to something that Peter said next. Let's go to 2 Peter 1, verses 5 through 7.

**2 Pt. 1:5-7** – Peter said, “*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*” So Peter uses the exact same word that Paul used. It's translated *temperance* in the King James Bible, but the real meaning of the word is self-control. He says that it is important to have it, and he puts it in the middle of a spiritual progression that moves from faith to love. But what does the word mean as he meant it back then?

Well, I'm going to look in Vine's *Expository Dictionary*. It comes from a Greek word *kratos*, which means *strength*. So self-control, as it's used in the Bible, has to do with strength – the strength to control oneself. So it's about character. Now, I may slip up during this presentation and use some language from my work, because at the clinic where I work, we don't talk about character. We talk about ego-strength. Now, many people, when they hear the word *ego*, they think of hubris, arrogance or conceit. “He's *egotistical*, or *egocentric*,” we say. But the way we use the word at work, generally, it's just means *the self*. That part of you that's just sitting there listening to this presentation and thinking about it is your ego. It's your self. So ego-strength, in part, refers to the level of resilience that you have to live your life in a healthy way – to withstand the blows of life – but also to take yourself in hand and make choices that are good for you, and for your life and your self.

Let me ask you this question. Do you think people who do have the Holy Spirit can have self-control? So, if it's a fruit of the Spirit, then, how would someone who doesn't have the Spirit be able to have a fruit of it? A lot of people think that all these fruits of the Spirit are only found in people who have the Holy Spirit, and yet, I think I can demonstrate that that's not really true. We've got to start thinking about what the Holy Spirit does in a different way, I think, if we think that way. The same word that's used by Peter and Paul is used to talk about athletic training in the Bible. People have to have self-control to train for boxing, and track, and this and that. Would you say that only people who are converted can participate in athletics successfully? No, of course not. So, what's the answer to the question then? Well, let's look further into it, but before we do that, we're still talking about what Peter and Paul meant when they used the word *self-control*. So before we think about something as human as self-control can be a fruit of the Spirit, let's look in another dictionary to expand the meaning of the word.

The *Lonida Greek Lexicon* says that this word can mean “to exercise complete control over one's desires and actions; to hold oneself in.” Have you ever thought of a smart remark that you wanted to make to somebody that was giving you a bad time, and you realized that if you said it, it would only make things much, much worse? So, we have to *hold it in*, don't we? Otherwise, it's going to get a lot worse. We'll be in big trouble.

James talked about the tongue being a little member, but hard to control.

**Jm. 3:1** – In James 3:1, he said, “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment, for we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he’s a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn the whole body. Look also at ships. Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles.* He adds this idea of a bridle that comes into play when we think of biblical self-control. That is what he’s talking about, isn’t he? Controlling what comes out of our mouth. The Lonida says, “To make clear what James meant, we could say, ‘one who does not tell his tongue what to say,’ or ‘one who does not tie his tongue down,’ or ‘one who cannot stop his talking.’”

I worked with a sixth grader who had been bullied all his life. He told me a sad tale of taunting and abuse from the day he started school. Extremely intelligent, kind of geeky, always running his mouth – irritated everybody with this eccentricities. He was larger than the other boys, but they just got so irritated with him that they’d pick on him. He was an easy target. He was one that needed to chart a new course for himself with his tongue. He’s trying to learn to do that.

Lonida also said this word means, “to command oneself; to make one’s heart obedient; to man one’s own desires; to be the master of what one wants; and to command one’s heart.” I’m thinking about young people. Some of them seem to think that once they develop a crush on somebody, they have no control over what happens next. If you’re sixteen, it’s not time for you to get married yet. And you’d do much better if you waited until you’re in your mid to late twenties. You do not have to become twitterpated over somebody just because you get a crush on them. You *can* control yourself. All you have to do is refrain from spending a lot of time with them, and don’t *tell* anybody about it, except for maybe your mother. And it will go away after awhile. It will. *You* have control over things like that. No one else. That also is self-control – to be able to command one’s heart and to master what you want.

Finally Lonida says it means “to say, ‘No,’ to one’s body.” We have all these human appetites that need to be controlled – food and sex being two main ones. So, it should be pretty clear by now what Peter and Paul were talking about when they said, “Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.”

So, let’s move on. Let’s talk about why self-control is important. (We’re still going to get back to answer that question, by the way, about how it can be a fruit of the Spirit if it’s something that’s physical like self-control.) Let’s go to 2 Peter 1, and read a little bit ahead of where we were reading before – get the context of what Peter’s saying - why self-control is important to Christians and to God.

**2 Pt. 1:1** – *Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us, by the righteousness of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ.* Okay, Peter says that he is a *bondservant* of Jesus Christ. Christ owns him.

Christ *bought* him. And he sold himself to God. Now he has to do what Jesus wants, instead of what he wants. “I am a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” But Jesus isn’t going to *make* him do anything, is He? No. Peter has already *promised* to do all of those things. Peter has promised to make *himself* do those things. So, that’s why self-control is important to Christians. It takes self-control – the strength to control self in order to keep our end of the deal. So when we are told that any athlete exercises self-control so that he can win the prize, we can see that we also can exercise self-control to keep our covenant with God.

So, how does the Holy Spirit figure into that then? If an athlete exercises self-control to win a boxing contest, what does the Holy Spirit have to do with it? How does the Spirit come into play? Well, self-control, in this case that Peter’s talking about, is a fruit of the Spirit because we are *motivated* by the Spirit of God to exercise self-control and seek the spiritual things of God. That’s why it’s a fruit of the Spirit. It’s not that we’re exercising something that’s spiritual. The Spirit is *motivating* us to exercise self-control – control of our body and our mind, which *all* humans have to do.

**V-2** – Then he says, “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Some of us know that Jesus Christ died so that we would be free of our sins. That’s the grace part. And some of us know that we are forgiven of them, and no longer are under the penalty – that we have reserved for each of us a crown of righteousness. That’s the peace part. Then he says, “*As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue.*” See, one of the things that the divine power have given us is the *desire* to be like Jesus Christ. As Peter said, that desire comes from the knowledge that we have of what Christ has offered us and done for us.

**V-4** – *By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* So we can be motivated by these incredible, precious promises – life with God as His children in a harmonious and happy spiritual family forever.

**V-5** – *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.* So, because of these promises – we’ve been offered these great and precious promises – and because of the promise *we* have made, we’re motivated to put on this divine nature and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to develop these attributes of God in our heart.

Now, I want to read some more from Vine’s about these last two verses. It says, “Twice, in Acts 24:25, the word *self-control* follows *righteousness*, which represents God’s claims – self-control being man’s responses thereto.” (We control ourselves.) “And in 2 Peter 1:6, it follows *knowledge*, suggesting that what is learned requires it to be put into practice.” And that takes self-control, doesn’t it?

I recently told you that story about a teen I know who said, “I need to learn to pray.” You might remember the story. And I asked her, “Why do you want to do that?” And she said, “So I can get to know God better.” So she has this spiritually motivated desire to get to know God better. She realizes that she’s going to take herself in hand and develop a new habit – the habit of praying. So that’s why self-control is a part of this picture. “I know I have to set aside time to do, or it won’t happen,” she told me. So, to do this, she’ll have to control herself. And the motivation for that *comes* from the Holy Spirit. Carnally-minded people don’t want to get to know God better. That comes from the Holy Spirit. The self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, isn’t it? That’s how that works. Notice what comes after self-control in Peter’s progression. It’s perseverance. And she’s also going to have to do that, isn’t she? She’s going to have to take herself in hand and make herself pray. And then she’s going to have to persevere in it. We don’t get to know God in fifteen minutes. It takes a while. And that’s a fruit of the Spirit, we’re told.

I’m working with a twelve-year-old right now who throws tantrums. A twelve-year-old who throws tantrums – as in kicking a hole in the wall at her house – that kind of tantrum – and as in ripping a door off its hinges. I mean, she’s just a little tiny girl. And she tore a door off its hinges. I don’t know if I could do that. But she’s never learned to control herself. We have this internal accelerator in our mind. When we’re little that gets fired up when we can start crawling around a lot. When our parents tell us, “No....” When we’re about to get on a heater, or touch the stove, or climb up on a rickety chair, they’ll tell us, “No,” and so we have to put on our brakes in that control center in the mind. This little girl never learned to do that, because her mother never told her, “No.” She was afraid that she would be abusive to her like her parents were to her, so she went to the other extreme, and the kid never learned self-regulation. Now she’s twelve-years-old and she gets in fights at school, and she mouths off to teachers, and she throws tantrums at home because she can’t control herself. So it’s a real problem for her.

There are two reasons, I think, why it’s important to have self-control. We haven’t enumerated them yet, but, boiling it down, we can talk about motives for self-control, or why it’s good for us. One is to live, even apart from God, we need to control ourselves. If I ate everything that I wanted to eat, I wouldn’t be around long. I’d be round, but I wouldn’t be *around* long. And there are many other ways that we need to control ourselves. I suppose if I *said* everything I thought to say, I would probably be in big trouble, too. I know that I have lots of company in confessing that. The second reason is to keep our covenant with God. To live godly, we need to control ourselves. When I say, “keep our covenant with God,” we all realize we can’t do that perfectly. We’re not doing that to earn salvation. We’re doing it because of what’s been done for us. One of the things that happens to us, when the Holy Spirit works in us, is, it motivates us to be like God. To do that, we have to exercise self-control.

Now I’m hoping you will agree with me, at this point, that everything we’ve discussed so far is pretty simple and pretty straightforward. So why would I say this topic is such a huge topic to cover? Well, you see, there’s this problem that has to do with human nature and how we are. We, as humans, instead of controlling ourselves, we would much rather control other people. And that’s the problem.

People come to our clinic with their children everyday, and they say, “My child has a problem.” And we say, “What problem is that?” And they say, “Well, he’s angry,” or “He’s rebellious,” or “He doesn’t do what he’s told,” or whatever. So we talk to the child, and ninety percent of the time we find out that the child is only reacting normally to improper treatment. He doesn’t have a problem, unless you call his parents his problem. So, of those cases – which is ninety percent – seventy-five percent of the time, the problem the parents have – not the kid, but the problem the *parents* have – is that they have tried to over-control their child. They’ve set the boundaries too tight on them. So they’re actually fighting against their child’s own development. That makes kids really angry. So what is the solution to that? Well, we teach parents how to set boundaries loose enough to allow for growth, but tight enough to keep them safe. And we teach parents how to *respect* their children and communicate love to them. What happens after that is, they usually go home really pleased to learn all this new stuff, and they come back later because they had trouble implementing it – because it’s not their natural style. They have to control themselves to do it. We, at that point, tell them they can’t change their children, but they can change themselves. Then their children will react to the new them. If you treat your child with respect, your child will respect you eventually. If you want your child to stop throwing tantrums, you can’t go ballistic and go off on your kid all the time. I mean, that makes sense, doesn’t it? They’re just following the model, right? So, they have to take control of themselves.

That’s a good example of what I mean when I say that God wants us to control *ourselves*, instead of controlling others. You know, “I’m going to put this kid in a D-home, because they’re so angry and rebellious. That’s how I’m going to change them.” That doesn’t make sense, does it? But if I start treating my child with respect, holding reasonable and fair boundaries *consistently* with them, and expressing love and respect at the same time *calmly*, eventually they will respond to that. Because that’s what they wanted all along. But they have to do those things, and they have to set those boundaries. But if they’re too controlling, that will stifle the growth of their child. And that’s a very bad thing to happen to a child.

I was talking to an older teen at the Feast this year. I never had ever talked to her before. She just walked up to me after a presentation at the Feast, and she asked me what to do about her over-protective father. Now, I’ve known her father for years, but I’ve never been around him much. So I asked her a few questions and learned that he was trying to control her way too much for her age. He was just worried about her safety. He’s a good man. He’s not mean. It’s just that he wanted her to be safe. I asked her what she’d already tried, and she said that she’d mostly just gotten frustrated and she had no clear plan. I asked her if she and her dad were close. She said, “Yes.” I said, “Here’s what you should do. You should ask him if you could talk to him sometime about something personal – kind of build it up in his mind that there’s something *important* you want to talk to him about. Then, before you talk to him, you need to think of a time when *he* felt constricted or controlled either at work or at church.” So she thought of one right away. Then I said, “I want you think of three examples of how he restricts *you* too much.” And she had no problem coming up with those. So I said, “When you get with him, and you have his

attention, smile at him. Give him a hug. Tell him you love him. Then ask him, ‘Do you remember the time the minister did this to you?’ (and that’s when you bring out your example about him being restricted) ‘and how unfair it felt to you?’ Then after he says, ‘Yes,’ you say, ‘Well, you make me feel the same way when you do...’ (and you quote your three things). Then tell him that you know that he’s trying to take care of you, but you need more room to grow, and that you have to make some decisions on your own, you’re not trying to be rebellious, and ask him if he will renegotiate with you the family boundaries. And if that doesn’t work, call me, and we’ll go to plan B.” But she never called me, and the last time I saw her, she seemed quite happy. And so did he. So, I think that probably worked out fairly well for them.

There’s always the parents trying to control the kids. Then there’s the issue of husbands and wives who want to control each other. We don’t know anything about that, do we? (Laughter) Paul said that husbands and wives.... (Let me pull it together here. We’re having fun today, aren’t we?) Paul said that husbands and wives are supposed to submit themselves to each other in their relationship – to be a team, to love each other, to help each other, (Notice that I’m not looking up.) to build each other up, to promote growth in each other, instead of stifling each other’s growth. But sometimes, despite our best efforts, it just turns into a tug-of-war instead. We keep trying to get the other to change – to turn into the kind of person *we* want them to be, instead of changing ourselves so they’ll react to the change. We always try to get the other person to change. We want to control *them*, instead of changing *ourselves*. What we really need to do is control ourselves.

I was talking to a young girl recently about her ex-boyfriend. He was very controlling and jealous. He wouldn’t let her talk to other guys at all. When she tried to break up with him, he tried to forcibly remove her from the school grounds so he could talk sense into her. They had to call the police. He wound up in jail. He started stalking her after that. She mentioned that while she was in that relationship, before it got really bad, she became the same way – very jealous and possessive of him. But after all of this really extreme stuff happened – after he started stalking her and after he tried to manhandle her – she realized that that approach was sick and twisted. It made her feel like she was his property, instead of a person, and demeaning of her. I was explaining to her that it was really good for her to let go of that attitude and to realize that that was a very harmful attitude. Because if people have that controlling, managing attitude, they can *never* really be intimate with anybody. Because intimacy is when people share their feelings without fear of being changed by the other person.

Now, God wants us to change, but He doesn’t force us to that! When we go to Him in prayer, we don’t have to be afraid that He’s going to try to change us, do we? It never enters our mind, because He never has. Instead, He loves us and He takes care of us, just like husbands and wives are supposed to do with each other, and just like parents are supposed to do with their children, and that draws us to Him. That’s what He wants. That’s what He wants from us. And that’s what works.

I was watching a news program about a guy who was married and had children, and who for years took a video camera in the malls and groceries stores, and stalked children. He would sexually assault them, sometimes while their parents were an aisle over, in broad daylight. He was a pedophile. Eventually he tried to rape a teenager, and was caught. They gave him four hundred and fifty-some years in prison. The report was interviewing the psychologist who had studied his case, and she explained that the power of the pedophile and the helplessness of the victim sexually excited him. So pedophilia is all about control. I think that most people know that rape is always about that. It's about dominance and control, rather than sex. And pedophilia is a strange mix of those things, too. That's a pretty extreme example of how we want to control others, rather than ourselves. It's interesting that this man was talking about how he'd lived a tortured life while he was doing all these terrible things, because he felt like he could not change. He couldn't control himself.

Now, we haven't really talked too much about one of the main things that most of us are concerned about, and that is control at church. Congregational members seem to want to control each other. There are always people who want to manage everybody and control everything. Why do they do that? Well, I think there are two reasons. Some people believe they know better than others – or maybe more than others. That really isn't bad in itself. There are lots of people who know a lot more than I do about a lot of things. And if I'm interested in learning what they know, I appreciate them telling me about it. That's a good thing. It's just that, when we start trying to force it on people, that it's a problem – when we try to control what they know and what they think. When we start tearing congregations apart over it, or expelling people because they won't conform to our beliefs, then it's a problem.

Now some people hearing that, may ask, “Don't you believe in all speaking the same thing? Or in doctrinal agreement?” Well, where have you ever seen that perfectly? For a brief time in the New Testament church, everybody believed the same thing because they all heard Jesus say it, but it didn't take long before people started to develop different understandings about things – just because we all hear things differently. Then others ... they started trying to pull people off for themselves and things were twisted. Now we look and see what we have today in the world, and there are millions of different ideas about Christianity and what it is. We had a man that worshipped with us for a number of years some time back, and he believed quite differently from the rest of us. But he didn't try to force his beliefs on us, and we didn't try to control him, and require him to believe just like we did. He was a decent person, and we were happy to have him with us. So, that's one reason why people at church try to control others. It has to do with trying to create doctrinal uniformity.

The second reason why people attempt to control others has a lot to do with anxiety. Anxious people often have to manage everything and keep it neat and tidy in order to feel safe. “We can't have all these different beliefs in the church. We've got to require that people all think just like *we* do.” And you can't really do that. You can cause people to conform, but you can't cause them to think and believe the same things you believe if they believe differently.

Quite frequently, when we look at a group of people, and they appear to us to be uniform in their beliefs, what we're really looking at is conformity. People don't say what they think in order to maintain their status in the organization. That's not unity of belief. The unity of belief it talks about in the Bible comes from the Holy Spirit, not from the way things are organized.

But for those type of folks, who are very anxious, order and routine become very important to them. Think about those people who have obsessive-compulsive disorder. They wash their hands multiple times a day. Sometimes they wash them until they're raw and bleeding. Or they lock and unlock a door a certain number of times in order to feel safe. They have all kinds of rituals. And it's all about reducing anxiety. The order and the rituals are to keep everything safe and manageable.

Now hearing that, some people might say, "Don't you believe in organization and leadership?" Is all organization caused by anxiety? Of course not. In the New Testament, it shows us that they were organized. They knew each other. They met together. There was an ordained ministry. Ministers played various roles. But their emphasis was not on controlling other people. It was on service. It was on taking care of people and doing the work.

Let's look in Luke 22:24.

**Lk. 22:24** – It says here, *Now there was also a dispute among them – that would be the disciples – as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. Not so among you. On the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater? He who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? And yet I am among you as the one who serves.”*

“He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger.” What does that mean? Well, you know, the young guy, he has the lowest pay, the smallest office, the slowest computer, and the least control. “And he who governs as he who serves.” There are those in any organization – and church included – that govern, but in the church, they're not there to control other people. They're there instead to *serve* them. In the church, leadership and service are the very same thing. That's why Jesus washed their feet. That was the point He was making.

It's really sad to me that the word *minister* means what it means to so many people today. To most people, the word *minister* means a religious authority figure, when in the New Testament it simply meant *servant*.

Like I said, we're going to cover a lot more about this at a later time, but as we close I want to look at one scripture that helps us understand what to do with anxiety. It's in Philippians 4:6.

**Philp. 4:6** – It says, *Be anxious for nothing*. When we're not anxious for anything, there's no reason to change anything or control anybody. We just have to work on ourselves. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*. See, the way to deal with anxiety, according to Jesus, is to have faith – have faith in God. Rather than controlling people, and over-managing things, and micro-managing everyone, we're to trust that the Holy Spirit will guide people and direct them into all truth, just like God promises. With our own personal anxieties, we're to take them to God. We're to be anxious for nothing and let Him take care of it. Instead of trying to control others to reduce our anxiety, we're to take control of ourselves, asking God, who has control over everything, to control the things we cannot. That's the Christian solution. If we will do that, then there is a promise there for us – that our anxiety will be reduced, and that the peace of God, which is beyond human comprehension, will guard our hearts and our minds through Jesus Christ.

So that's why I believe that if we are to grow to be truly spiritually-minded, we need to *stop* trying to control other people and work on controlling ourselves.