

Self Control

(James Ch 3)

Self control is another way of saying what is defined in the Bible as “temperance”. Included in this is self denial, gaining control of one’s self and doing things in moderation. A person who looks for a place in God’s kingdom must make sacrifices, and to do this they must gain control of themselves. This is very difficult to do, as even the Apostle Paul admitted in Romans 7:19

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

When he wanted to do good, he found that evil was present in him and so a great internal fight would begin, but it was his duty to try to beat this desire to do wrong. This applies not only to Paul, but also in our actions and in our thoughts and our speech.

The wise man Solomon tells us “*that as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he*”. Proverbs 23:7. It is right then to tune our thoughts toward spiritual things, and to think of God and His loving kindness, His mercy, and of His compassion towards us who are the most undeserving of it all. To do this we must try to gain mastery over our thoughts, and to have any hope of achieving this we must deny ourselves something. A very good illustration of this is given by the Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 9: 24

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Speaking of athletes, he says that in everything there had to be moderation. His thoughts, his living, even his food could not be excessive if he hoped for victory. Athletes when training must deprive themselves of many things to train hard. In Verse 25 he says they do this to try to obtain a “*corruptible crown*”, that is, one, which won’t last. How much more should we deny ourselves things, for the crown that we are striving for is an incorruptible one “*that fadeth not away*”.

Paul tells us if we wish to be like Christ, we must crucify ourselves daily. What did he mean? He completely cut himself off from the things that did not profit, and brought himself into slavery or bondage to Christ. How careful we must be with our thoughts, because they always precede speech and actions, if our thoughts are wholesome so will be our speech and actions.

Perhaps the hardest thing to gain control over is the tongue, which although only a very small portion of our body, yet it is full of “*deadly poison*” James 3:8. Read of what Jesus has written concerning coming Judgment which we have to face in Matthew 12:36

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

It is most important that we not only thoroughly read James 3, but that we try to put what he says into practice. How often do we say things that we wished had never said? It is hard for us to visualise beautiful clear fresh water and also salt water coming from the same tap, or a certain tree bearing a fruit which does not belong to it, and yet out of the mouth that is part of creative work of God, from which we praise Him and glorify His Holy name, and at other times terrible words also come out. Don’t forget this point, which James is trying to impress; that is that we are all made in the likeness of God, and if we gave a little more thought to this aspect we would not be quite so ready to speak evil of or condemn one another. It is very easy to look around us at the outside world to find just how this description fits so many people, but if we examine ourselves as we are commanded to do, and do it honestly, we don’t have to go past ourselves. A person who fits this description can never have peace of mind, because his whole life is one of turmoil.

As regards our actions, the same principle applies, for we must exercise self control and discipline here as well. It is not much use if our mind is exercised by thinking upon Spiritual things, and speaking about those things, if we don’t put those things into effect by our actions, this would be hypocrisy. In our actions we have to be very careful to consider others, for we may feel as though we could do a certain thing without affecting our conscience, but another may see us and follow our example and yet by that action fall and lose the opportunity of salvation. The spirit of self denial should prevail as it did in Paul. 1st Corinthians 8:10-13. It is much easier to not do a certain thing than it is to go half way with it.

Moderation and temperance in all things is the Scriptural advice.

Please read also Philippians 4:4-9, Galatians 5:19-26, 2nd Peter 1:6-8.