

(This sermon is from our *Growing In Genesis Series*)

I AM DEPENDENT ON GOD FOR SELF-CONTROL

Genesis 4:1-15; Proverbs 25:28

INTRODUCTION:

During the early days of aviation, a stunt pilot was selling rides in his single engine airplane. One day he got into an argument with an old farmer who insisted upon taking his wife along on the ride -- at no extra charge. "Look," said the pilot, "I'll take you both up for the price of one if you promise not to utter a sound throughout the entire trip. If you make one sound, the price is doubled." The deal was made and they all climbed aboard the plane. The pilot then proceeded to put the aircraft through maneuvers designed to make the bravest person tremble. But not a sound came from the back, where his passengers sat. Exhausted, he set the plane down. As the farmer climbed out, the pilot said, "I made moves up there that frightened even me, and yet you never said a word. You're a fearless man." "Well thank you," replied the farmer. "But I must admit that there was one time when you almost had me." "And when was that?" asked the pilot. The farmer replied, "That was about the time my wife fell out!" Talk about self-control!

How many of you would agree that many of the problems in our lives, many of the problems facing our society today, stem from a lack of self-control? We see all kinds of evidence of lack of self-control in:-- spending; greed; materialism; anger; rudeness; drug abuse; illicit sex; divorce; murder -- and on and on the list goes describing a society that lives with a desire for immediate gratification -- We cannot control ourselves.

Not surprisingly, this lack of self-control goes back to the beginning of the human race. Last week we saw that Adam and Eve didn't have self-control when they rejected God's plan for their lives. And in today's text we find that their son Cain, also lacked self-control to a perhaps, greater extent than his parents.

- READ Genesis 4:1-15

Transition: Using Cain as our example, let's take a few moments to discover...

1. WHY WE LACK SELF-CONTROL

1) We Have A Selfish Attitude

We notice that Cain brought a mediocre sacrifice to God. Some have mistakenly thought the issue was that Cain brought fruit as a sacrifice while his brother Abel brought an animal sacrifice. But that wasn't the problem -- the problem was that Cain was selfish and refused to bring God the best of what he had.

Abel brought the firstborn of his flock because he wanted to give the finest that he could offer to the Lord.

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead (Heb. 11:4)

The whole issue here involves the attitude with which our sacrifices are offered. When God didn't approve of Cain's offering, Cain got angry, and God told him he needed an attitude adjustment.

- READ vv. 6-7

God warned Cain that sin "was crouching at (the) door". Perhaps this was what Peter was thinking of when he wrote, "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*" (1 Pet. 5:8)

We need to do some self-examination in this area: Are we guilty of having an arrogant, selfish attitude? In our giving to God, in our church attendance, in our spiritual walk, are we giving God our best, or are we giving Him the leftovers? In our worship to God, are we striving for excellence, are we giving Him the best moments of our day, are we using our spiritual gifts for the furtherance of His Kingdom, or are we busy making excuses as to why we can't fully devote ourselves to Him and His Church?

Now what does all this have to do with self-control? The first step in losing control takes place when we place ourselves before our God in order of importance. When we begin to enthrone ourselves instead of bowing before God's throne we begin to lose proper perspective and the sin that is "crouching at our door" begins to invade our hearts.

2) We Give in to Impulsive Desires

Cain resented his younger brother whose sacrifice God had approved. God had commanded him to master his emotions and learn to control himself. But in a moment of rage, Cain took his own brother's life.

A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control (Prov. 29:11)

When David sinned with Bathsheba, he acted on an impulse of lust. When Peter denied Jesus as His Lord he acted on an impulse of fear. Like them, when you and I lose self-control it is usually because we are acting on an impulsive moment of lust, greed, anger, or something else that for that moment has us in its grasp.

3) We are Rebellious

You would think that when Cain saw his dead brother he would have been heartbroken and repentant. But when God questioned Cain he flippantly replied "Am I my brother's keeper?" That sounds like a spoiled teenager who hasn't gotten his/her way. He is saying what we say every time we lose control -- by our actions and attitudes we are saying to God, "What gives you the right to question me?", "Who do you think you are?", "I'm in charge of my life". And in our rebellious moments we become very ugly people.

4) Our Defenses Have Been Weakened

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

- In the ancient cities the walls that surrounded them was their protection against enemy forces, and thieves (Prov. 25:28)

If those walls were broken down the city could not longer defend itself. The proverb teaches us that when we lack self-control, our defenses are weakened, and we are not able to stand as people of faith, integrity, and honesty.

Well those are some of the reasons we lack self-control. The good news is that there is something we can do about it.

2. STEPS FOR DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL

Perhaps it would be helpful if we considered a definition for self-control before we go any further. Someone has said that, "Self-control is the ability to break a chocolate bar in four pieces with your bare hands and then just eat one of the pieces".

The dictionary tells us that self-control is, "the control of one's own emotions, desires, and actions." The fact of the matter is, "Self-control" is a bit of an oxymoron.

An oxymoron is a phrase containing conflicting terms, such as "jumbo-shrimp", or speaking of a "mild winter" in Minnesota.

Biblically, "self-control" means self under control. In fact, instead of being in control of ourselves, it actually means allowing ourselves to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:23 says that self-control is one aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit. Romans 8:9 says that we as Christians *"are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit."* It is a matter of giving our thoughts, emotions, actions, and reactions over to the control of God.

Let me give you 5 practical ways that we can do that.

1. **Admit you have a problem**

Take responsibility for your lack of self-control. James tells us (1:14) *"...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed"*

Notice where the source of temptation comes from – It does not say:-- the devil made me do it; my lack of self-control comes from my dysfunctional parents or my dysfunctional background; because of my past experience or abuse, or because of a painful experience in my past, I can't control my behavior today. The source of our lack of self-control is us!

And we need to take personal responsibility for our lack of self-control. We do bad things because we like to do them. And we need to admit that right up front before we can go any further.

Where are you lacking self-control in your life? Do you have a problem with:-- alcohol?; time management?; drugs?; temper?; gossip?; the way you spend your money?; lust?; greed?; laziness?

Whatever area you are having a problem in, identify that area and then begin to bring it to God. God knows about it already, your not bringing Him any new information. But by admitting your problem and bringing it to Him you are beginning to go down the path of recovery. That is the starting point for developing self-control.

2) **Forget your past**

You need to put your past behind you if you are going to develop self-control. Notice what Paul says, *"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal..."* (Phil. 3:13-14).

It is very important that you understand that there is a misconception, or a lie, that many of us live with in terms of really wanting to change our lives. The lie goes something like this:--"once a failure, always a failure"; "I tried to change that in my life before and I couldn't do it then, so there's no way I can do it now"; "I can't change" These are lies -- They are misconceptions. We need to put the past behind us and look forward to what God can do in our future, and what God can change in our lives.

Have you ever watched a baby who is just learning to walk? They fall, they hit their head, tumble, roll every which way. It's a scary time for a parent watching their child try to take their first steps in life.

You notice that children fall down a lot when they begin walking. It is part of the process -- they just get up and try it again -- they are persistent. Now, can you imagine a little child who is learning to walk, and after falling 2 or 3 times deciding that:-- "this whole thing is hopeless"; "I have failed several times before, no use trying again"; "I guess some people are walkers and some people aren't."

This sounds absurd doesn't it? But, in the same way, if we really took a good hard look at ourselves, we'd realize that this is the kind of attitude we've had in many areas of our lives. We need to put our past behind us. It doesn't matter how many times you have failed, try again. Only this time, we must admit our need for God -- admit that we are the problem and begin to focus on what God can do instead of focusing on our past.

3) Ignore your emotions

Just because we feel something doesn't make it right. We tend to think everything in life has to feel good or it is not worth doing. But our feelings/emotions cannot be our guide in life, because our feelings and emotions are not reliable sources.

Many times our feelings say: I want a second helping; I want another drink; I want to have an affair; I need my needs met; I want to spend my whole day watching TV. Our feelings and emotions often lead us to the opposite of self-control. We need to challenge our emotions -- We need to line our feelings up with what God says. And with Christ as the master of our lives, we can learn to master our emotions.

"For the grace of God...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives..." (Tit. 2:12)

We don't have to give in -- We can resist -- We can say no. We don't have to depend on our strength because we have the supernatural strength of Christ in our lives.

4) Avoid Temptation

If you have a weakness for ice cream, don't keep ice cream in the house when you are trying to lose weight. If you are tempted by pornography, then stay away from places where it is made available. We need to avoid those areas where we are tempted in life. And we need to identify those areas so we can avoid them. The Bible teaches that we are to run away from temptation.

"...do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:27)

We need to stay away from the areas that we know we are tempted in life. Robert Orrin was right when he said, "Most people want to be delivered from temptation but would like to keep in touch." What is it in your life that you need to run from? Identify it, turn it over to God, and avoid it at all costs.

5) Depend on Christ's Power

This is the most important step to lasting self-control. If we want to develop self-control, we need to learn to depend on Christ's power. We do not have the kind of power to resist temptation in our own strength, in our own ability. We need Christ's power in our life if we are going to resist temptation and overcome and master our feelings, desires and passions.

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Gal. 5:16)

Notice the sequence of this verse. Notice it does not say that if you have the Spirit of God in your life you will not have any fleshly desires. Even as a born again

Christian you will have temptations and struggles with the flesh. The promise here is that if we live by following the Holy Spirit's directions, we will overcome the desires of our sinful nature. We usually get it wrong and say something like-- "Once I get my act together I'll...."; "Once I deal with the mess of my life, then I will invite God into my life" But God is not looking for that. God is saying to you and to me, "Come to me just as you are, bring all the garbage, bring those bad habits in your life and I will come in. I will give you the power to transform and change your life. Surrender your life to me."

The truth is, is that we need Christ in our lives right now to help us break those bad habits, clean up our lives, resolve those problems. We need His strength, His power, and His help if our lives are ever going to be truly under control.

CONCLUSION:

In what area of your life do you lack self-control? Maybe there is one, maybe there are many areas. Maybe your entire life is out of control. The secret to self-control is Christ control. When you surrender your life to Christ, God will transform and change you. That is what God is in the business of doing. That is why Jesus died on the cross. That is why it is Good News.

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