

May 27, 2018

What kind of people ought we to be?

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."
Galatians 5:16-25

At the end of the Apostle Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit is the one thing that God has given each of us that makes all the others possible. That gift is self-control. As we have often discussed, in the beginning we were made to be like God in that we were created to be eternal beings and we were created with the capacity to choose our behaviors instead of acting instinctively.

Unlike all other life forms we have from an early age the gift of choice, and with it we have the gift of accountability. That second aspect of this gift might be the reason that most of us would like to forget that we have the power of choice and that we can and must be self-controlled.

When God presented Adam and Eve with his first commandment, ***"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** (Genesis 2:16-17) With this one commandment our God presented us with the capacity to choose obedience or rebellion. We can choose to obey God's will or we can rebel against his will and choose our own course. Either way, we have the power to be self-controlled.

Of course, we enjoy exercising our power to choose until our choices lead to negative consequences. And then we do what humans have done since the beginning; we blame and justify. ***"The woman you put here with me..."*** and ***"The serpent deceived me..."*** (Genesis 3:12-13) We have to recognize in this account that those attempt to blame and justify did not free Adam and Eve from being held accountable for their choices.

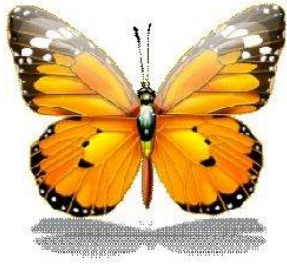
We have the power to be self-controlled because our Creator has endowed us with the capacity to choose our behaviors. So, why do we find self-control such a difficult power to wield effectively? I am convinced that two of the major challenges to becoming truly self-controlled are, first we are more interested in controlling others than we are in controlling our selves, and second we struggle not to be reactive which steals our ability to be self-controlled.

All of us struggle to see our selves honestly. It is much easier to look at others and to find fault with their choices than it is to look at ourselves and accept responsibility for our own choices. Thus, when we receive a command from God we are much more prone to suggest that others need to obey it than to apply it to our own behaviors.

God commands wives to ***"...submit to your husbands as to the Lord..."*** and he commands husbands to ***"...love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."*** (Ephesians 5:22-25) For centuries those commandments have been misapplied because frankly, we don't want to hear them as they apply to us personally. Those commandments present clear choices. Wives are commanded to submit. Husbands are not commanded to make their wives submit. Wives are given the power to choose submission or to reject submission. Husbands are given the power to choose sacrificial love, but wives are not given the choice to nag their husbands about that choice.

Self-control demands that I accept my responsibility to choose how I will behave. The gift of self-control does not give me the right or responsibility to control others. I can only choose my behaviors and I will be held accountable for those choices.

Blame and justification will never free me from my responsibility for the choices I make. No matter how much I am influenced by those around me or by the environment in which I live, my power of choice is still fully intact. Scripture is full of those who recognized this truth even in the face of nearly overwhelming influences. Like them, I always have the power to choose; I always have the power to control my self, and I will always be held absolutely accountable for what I do with that power.



Choice and Accountability

Choose you this day whom ye will serve: ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).