

The Fruit of Self-Control

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a little kid, sometimes my younger brother and I would do something that ended up being rather risky, or maybe we attempted something that got one of us injured or that broke something in the house. When our actions seemed particularly foolish, my mother would sometimes cry out: Are you out of your ever-loving minds? I was never quite sure where she got that phrase, and whenever she used it, it was definitely the wrong moment to ask, but the idea was obvious enough. We seem to have taken leave of our senses. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we finish our fruit of the Spirit series with a look at the fruit of self-control; and as we will see, self-control has something to do with staying within your ever-loving mind. We will see how; stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this program represents the end of the longest series I think the two of us have ever done on this program; it is a nine-part series because we have been looking at the nine fruit of the Spirit. So, it has been a long series, but a rich series, because these fruit are so rich.

DAVE BAST

The last fruit today, Scott, and it is self-control; but you are right, what a wonderful bouquet this makes, doesn't it...these nine virtues; and just to go back to something I think we said in the very first program. These are not pick-and-choose qualities for Christians. This is not a cafeteria menu where you say: Well, I am not very good at self-control. I do not want to listen to this one today, but I will take love and joy and peace. This is a complete package that the life that the Spirit produces in a consecrated believer—the life of sanctification, of growing in holiness—his name is, after all, the Holy Spirit...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And this is what it looks like, holiness in action, these nine qualities.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we pointed out that the gifts of the Spirit are different for different people. Not everybody is a good preacher, not everybody is a good host. The gifts get distributed unevenly or differently, anyway; but the fruit are common to all, right; it is not a salad bar; but as we come to this last one, we have been emphasizing all along that these are fruit of the Spirit with the emphasis on the Spirit producing these things in us, which introduces us, maybe, to a small oddity on this one, because this fruit is called *self-control*...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, where is the spotlight here? Is it still the Spirit or is the spotlight suddenly on myself?

DAVE BAST

Right; are we just talking about will power?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

By another name, and doesn't everyone believe in that? Doesn't everyone want that? Doesn't everyone need that? So where does the Spirit come in? That is maybe the question that we would start with.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the question you start with is: Okay, is this the one fruit I am in charge of, or is this still the Holy Spirit? The answer is yes. Yes, it is about your self and your self-control, but the self we are talking about is the *new* self—the new you that was generated in baptism.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I think maybe there is one other little distinction we ought to make, or perhaps a bit of a caution, because my speaking personally, I will just talk about myself here, I am not going to put this on anyone else, but when I read this, I think...my tendency is to think: Well, why don't I have more of this if this is a fruit of the Spirit, why am I so lacking in self-control? What is wrong with me? So, it is not an easy or straight-forward thing. The Spirit does do this work in our lives, but we need to do something as well in keeping in step with him, as the wonderful verse goes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the Bible says that, yes; and you can find talk about self-control here and there all over the New Testament, but it really gets super concentrated in what we call the Pastoral Epistles of Paul, and those are the two letters to Timothy and the one letter to Titus, and there self-control comes up all over, and here is a classic passage. In Titus Chapter 2, Paul applies self-control to everybody in the Church.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, he starts out this way, speaking to Titus now, who is his assistant. He has been assigned to lead the church on the island of Crete in the western Mediterranean. So Paul says to Titus: You must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. ²Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled (there it is), and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance; ³likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live; not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good; ⁴then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled and pure; to be busy at home, to be kind, to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶And similarly, encourage young men to be self-controlled. ⁷In everything set them an example by doing what is good; in your teaching show integrity, seriousness, ⁸and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. So, there it is; self-control—older men, younger men, older women, younger women—self-control, self-control, self-control; and interestingly, Dave, here in the Greek the word is *sophroneo*. It is a different Greek word, actually, than what Paul uses in the classic fruit of the Spirit list in Galatians 5. That one is *egkrateia*, which means to be in power over yourself...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is often an image used for athletic disciplines and to keep yourself in check; but *sophroneo*, the word used here in Titus and throughout the Pastoral Epistles, literally means to be in your right mind.

DAVE BAST

Hmmm; so there is the thinking aspect of it again; as you said, Scott, are you out of your ever-loving mind, to quote your mother; or I think they say it down South: Are you out of your cotton-pickin' mind?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

Or we sometimes say of someone when they have done something, especially a child: What were you thinking...when you did that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, what were you thinking? And the answer is, well, you weren't. Now, I do want to make a little side note here. When we talk about being out of our minds as opposed to being in our right mind, we are not talking about mental illness here. We are not talking about those who have been afflicted with some sort of a mental disorder. That is not a sin, that is a disease that requires medical treatment. What we are talking about here are people with otherwise just fine, functioning brains...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who have every reason to know what is prudent and wise to do in a given situation, and sometimes just abandon that to do something silly or really risky or they think it will be fun to drink three whole cases of beer or something; or they decide to try to drive a hundred miles per hour down the highway, and again, the police officer will say: What were you thinking?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know better. So, we are talking about well-functioning people who sometimes do things that just seem like they weren't...that was foolish...you were not thinking.

DAVE BAST

Thoughtless, we might say...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, self-control has to do with that kind of rational, well-thought-through approach to what you do that involves the discipline to say no to things that are wrong; to say no to one drink too many, one helping too many, or one word too many; to be always in control that way with your mind thinking straight, thinking right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is rooted in, of course, a respect for God's creation, and a respect for the boundary lines and the moral boundary fences that God put up for our own protection; and if we are in Christ, then we have had that sense

of the boundedness of life renewed in us. We can see what God has ordained to be right and what is wrong, and why; and by the Spirit's help, we can live within that; and if we choose not to...if we think that we will be the one person that consequences will never back up on, and so we take some risky form of behavior, it is sort of like taking leave of our senses. We know better. So, keep yourself in check; but how exactly does that go; and what does some of that involve in a moment-to-moment basis? We will wonder about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are on the last of our nine-part series on the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5. We are talking about the fruit of self-control. This has kind of an aspect of sanity to it, that we use our minds; we do not act or behave thoughtlessly; we are able to control our actions because we are in control of our thinking; but then, you know, you begin to ask: Well, does this mean perhaps that everything is out of bounds?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We can never have any fun? Is self-control the same as estheticism? You know, you kind of have to enter a monastery and wear a hair shirt and never eat and fast all the time?

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, does it mean...and it has been caricatured this way by critics of Christianity...does it mean you just do not have any desires or passions at all? Well, no, it does not mean *that* at all. Our appetites...our passions...were created by God. He made us to enjoy food and drink and the sexuality within the marriage relationship; and life in general. Our passions are from God. Self-control does not mean having none, it means keeping them in their proper places and proportions.

DAVE BAST

Maybe we could put it this way: You can be self-controlled and passionate at the same time...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

You can be exuberant; you can embrace...you can love food...you can love the good things of life, but in a self-controlled way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I always think of the chef, Julia Child, who loved good food, but always in just the right portion, right? She never served super-sized portions, because you will enjoy it more and it is better for you. Or I am thinking of the great writer, Lew Smedes...Lewis B. Smedes, who once said: What is self-control like? It is like the conductor of a symphony orchestra. An orchestra has all kinds of parts: It has percussion; it has woodwinds and flutes and strings and brass, and they all have their part to play, but only if they come in at the right moment; only if they take rests now and then; and so, Lewis said self-control is like the Holy Spirit holding a baton like an orchestra conductor—a symphony conductor—and helping you to play the music just right, because otherwise all you have is a bunch of soloists on a binge; but what you want is the music that the orchestra can play when the conductor keeps everybody in their proper place, and that is like our passions.

DAVE BAST

Right; that is a wonderful analogy. Here is another one. We could think of it as a garden. We probably all passed gardens where things have gone out of control, and they are just growing wildly, and the beauty is really lost when that happens, it is just a mess; but to weed and to plant prudently and to make sure that areas and boundaries are kept and are well defined; that creates beauty in a garden; and it is the same way in our lives with the things that we love...with the things that we are passionate about. There needs to be those boundaries that we are able to keep; and the way we do that is by harnessing the power of the Spirit; or we might call it even the power of Jesus living in us, as a wonderful passage also from Titus Chapter 2...we quoted it a little bit ago, but here is another one a little bit further on, where we read about self-control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Titus 2:11: For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²That grace teaches us to say, "No," to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

DAVE BAST

I love that passage, and I have thought about it a lot; I have prayed about it a lot, because this is what I would like more of in my life; I would like more of the power to say no—to learn how to say no to your own passions—to your own appetites. What a wonderful gift that is, and how tragic it is when people do not have that...when because of whatever...their own sin, or perhaps we are complex and our motivations are complex, sometimes we are powerless in the face of certain temptations, or we seem to be...and so, maybe we need the help of others; but again, by the power of the Spirit, experiencing the grace of Jesus, Paul says...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Gives us that strength to be able to say no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes people think that freedom means saying yes to everything. Well, I can say yes to everything. I will say yes to another drink, another hamburger, another whatever; but true freedom is not saying yes to everything, true freedom is distinguishing when to say yes and when to say no; and when you say no to something that, you know, might be good, all things being equal, but maybe it isn't good for you right now, that also requires great strength; and Paul said in that passage that we just read, the strength comes from the grace of God. Grace has forgiven us our sins, but not only that, it is also a strength. It lets you say no to the things that are going to hurt you or that are going to cut against the holiness of God.

You said earlier, Dave, Titus was a pastor of a church on the Greek island of Crete, and apparently those people defined freedom as saying yes to everything, because in Titus Chapter 1, Paul sums up the particular congregation that Titus has to be pastor of when he says: You know, one of Crete's own prophets has said Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons; and then Paul writes: And that saying is true.

DAVE BAST

So, he also then emphasizes in this letter to Titus that Titus needs to emphasize sound doctrine, is the phrase that Paul used.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it comes in the teaching...doctrine, yes.

DAVE BAST

You need to teach them; you need to give them doctrine; you need to tell them the facts about Jesus—his coming into the world—his death for sin—his way of ransoming us and the power of his Spirit in the resurrection of Christ. That is all involved in sound doctrine, and according to Paul, that is part of the key to learning self-control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in a series we did on spiritual disciplines a while back on *Groundwork*, Dave, we pointed out that the words *sound doctrine* or *sound teaching*—the *sound* word there in Greek is *hugiainó*, from which we get our word *hygiene*. It is good spiritual hygiene, just like flossing your teeth and brushing your teeth and washing your hands and combing your hair; that is hygiene for your body; there is also hygiene for your soul; paying attention to the Spirit, paying attention to how grace can teach us and give us the strength to say no to things that are going to hurt our spiritual health; and it is all founded on healthy teaching...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The healthy teaching about the truth of Jesus and of his Spirit and of what is right and what is wrong in God's good creation.

DAVE BAST

So, let's...before we close out this program, let's talk in practical terms about some of the areas where we can apply this sound doctrine, or this healthy teaching, where we need to practice self-control in the power of the Spirit. We will turn to that next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking about the final fruit of the Spirit of a nine-part series on the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of self-control. We just said, Dave, it is rooted in the grace of God that appeared in Jesus, not only to forgive our sins, but also to give us strength to say no to ungodly, worldly passions; and that it is all founded on the sound, healthy teaching of the Gospel. It is good spiritual hygiene.

And in a devastating passage from another pastoral epistle, this one to Timothy—II Timothy 3—Paul predicts what will happen when people do *not* live this way, because he writes this:

But mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days. ²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, and not lovers of the good; ⁴treatorous, rash, conceited; lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having a form of godliness, but denying its power.

Now, that is Paul in a pretty blue mood here, I think...

DAVE BAST

Yes...you know what it is, as you were reading it, Scott, it is the *anti* fruit of the Spirit passage...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly.

DAVE BAST

I mean, this is the opposite, right down the line. Lovers of self rather than lovers of God...there is love, you know, and on and on and on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not forgiving, not being faithful...

DAVE BAST

Lacking self-control...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Brutal not gentle...

DAVE BAST

Yes, yes; all that; and notice how he prefaces this: In the last days, Paul says, this is how it is going to be; but in the New Testament, if you are familiar at all with the timeline of the New Testament, the last days began with Jesus' incarnation and his crucifixion and resurrection. According to the New Testament, that was the inauguration of the age to come. The world to come has already invaded this world, and we are living in the last days. So, it is no surprise... We are tempted to always think our day must be the worst of all; look at what is going on around us. Just look at social media; look at the things they are advocating; look at the things they are doing; look at the disasters, and look at the tragedies and the horrors that are inflicted; and we go back and read this and say: You know what? It was exactly the same in Paul's day; it has been the same in every age since then. This is how people live who do not have the Spirit of God; who may have the form of godliness...they may be religious outwardly, but they do not have the power of the Spirit living within them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul makes such a long list of activities here. I mean, when we think of self-control, we think mostly about eating, drinking, and sex. We do not want to be gluttonous, we do not want to be drunk, and we do not want to be promiscuous; but it is so much more than that; and so, as we close the program, I think looking at the passages we have seen today from Titus and Timothy, we can maybe very briefly think about self-control applied to three areas. They all start with an *a*—like good preachers, we try to use alliteration, right? Appetites, attitudes, and activities...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, self-control has something to do with our appetites, which includes eating, drinking...food and the like.

DAVE BAST

That is the food, drink, and sex area, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we do want to keep ourselves in check in the midst of a society that seems to think that more is always better. So now, they keep adding...have you ever noticed...they keep adding hamburger patties at Burger King. There is like...you can get four of them now on one burger.

DAVE BAST

There was a video documentary* about that a few years ago: *Super Size Me*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And our super-sized meals are making us super sized.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, yes, our appetites certainly also lead us to think about sexuality; and of course, we are living in an age where women, rightly so, are rebelling against the advances of powerful men who seem to think they can do anything...

DAVE BAST

You know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

They do not have to say no to their desires ever!

DAVE BAST

Yes, and here is the answer: If men behaved with self-control, women would not have to face the problems that they do in our culture. I mean, this is good stuff; this is needed in our society.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is self-control that teaches us to say, not totally no to our appetites, but to keep our appetites in their proper place. So, self-control has to do with appetites, but it also has to do with attitudes; and maybe I think one thing that we can see in some of the lists that Paul often makes of sins that we are to avoid, chief among them is often anger.

DAVE BAST

In an earlier program in this series we had Neal Plantinga, a wonderful guest, and insightful theologian and writer, and he talked about the middle virtues...or the virtues as they are listed, I think in Colossians 3 was his reference, of forgiveness and forbearance and patience. Those are anger management techniques...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And self-control is another in that same cluster of fruit of the Spirit. Do we have the power and the strength to hold our tongue, you know, when angry words bubble to the surface and want out...and want out of our mouths?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so often when they do it is because we are almost looking for perfection from other people—a perfection we never expect from ourselves; in fact, we use our tongues to lie about ourselves, to excuse ourselves; but when somebody else makes the same mistake, even if they are driving behind the wheel. I made a mistake driving the other day that when I see other people do it I yell at them inside my car. Why do I get off the hook and they get my anger? Self-control controls our attitudes. We are all in need of grace; I am; you are; I do not have a right to anger toward people who need grace as badly as I do. Then finally, appetites, attitudes, and activities, or our actions...

DAVE BAST

Or actions, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Self-control...yes, it has a lot to do with food and drink, but it can have a lot to do with how we act in other settings as well.

DAVE BAST

You know, there are people who are extremely disciplined. For some reason, they just do not have any trouble with food; they are skinny as a rail; they exercise regularly; they never over-indulge; but then you run into them and listen to them, and discover that they gossip and slander, and they are always telling a tale. There are other areas, aren't there, where we need to practice this fruit of the Spirit?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And self-control sometimes means that many times a rumor needs to die with me. I am not going to perpetuate it; I am not going to, as we were just saying, I am not going to use my tongue...as the Apostle James...we talked about James before on *Groundwork*, as well. James is unstinting: You have to tame your tongue to speak good words, to be slow to anger and swift to speak words that build people up. That requires self-control too. Taming the tongue requires self-control to say: No, I am not going to speak that gossipy word, but I am going to speak an up-building word.

DAVE BAST

And you know, as we close this program, and really, this whole series, we want to go back to the ground of it all, and that is the power of the Spirit in us to make this a subject of our daily prayers, our daily devotions, to pray through these fruit of the Spirit each day, and pray that the Spirit would continue to make them grow in my life, in your life, and so give glory ultimately to the Lord whose name we bear.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into the scriptures to lay the foundation for our lives.

We have a website; it is groundworkonline.com. Please visit that website, where you can suggest topics and passages for future *Groundwork* programs.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates that *Super Size Me* is a book, when in fact *Super Size Me* is a video documentary written and directed by Morgan Spurlock.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-fruit-of-self-control>

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