

Proverbs A La Carte: Self-Control

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[0:00] indwelling us by the Spirit of God at the moment of our conversion, uniting us to Christ and guaranteeing the inheritance to come. We are so grateful, God, that you will hold us fast.

Thank you, God, that you are an unchanging God in the midst of changing times. Thank you, God, that you speak timeless truths into a timely situation.

God, we need to hear from you today. And so, God, would you speak? Speak through your word today.

Address us, a people who lack self-control. Help us to be self-controlled. God, we turn to you now and say, speak, O Lord.

We are listening. It's in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Recently, I was looking at photographs of Aleppo, Syria.

[1:07] And Aleppo was the city where a civil war took place in Syria. And what made these photos so powerful is that they were before and after pictures.

Pictures of lovely homes, marketplaces, parks, before and then after this civil war. It was, the city was razed.

It's a pile of rubble. And what these pictures do is they help us to see something that Proverbs 25, 28 pictures as well.

And so, would you turn to your Bibles right now to Proverbs 25, 28. And we read this. A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

A raised pile of rubble. Someone who's not exercising self-control is exposed, vulnerable, and as good as plundered.

[2:12] It's quite a picture. It's quite a comparison. Someone who does not have impulse control is exposed. It's a situation of danger.

There's another war at work within us. It's a civil war inside of us between our passions and our appetites, even our thoughts. Unchecked, unrestrained passions, thoughts, appetites within us will ruin us.

We'll be like Aleppo's. So, this morning, in light of Proverbs 25, 28, in this obvious danger of not having self-control, I am going to call all of us on the authority of God's Word to be self-controlled.

But I got to be honest with you. This call to self-control is actually a call to treasure Christ. What I'm going to lay out for you, because God's Word lays out for you, is biblical self-control is a Christ-treasuring impulse control.

That's what biblical self-control is. And so, this morning, I'm going to call you to self-control by calling you to treasuring Christ.

[3:38] And on your bulletins, there are five statements. We fill in the blanks. And I'm going to walk you through those statements as we go along. But let me ask you this morning, are you feeling ruined?

Are you feeling defeated, devastated, ashamed? The same that some unchecked, out-of-control passion or desire ruling your being and causing ruin?

Well, this call to self-control this morning, to treasure Christ, he has grace for that. He turns ruin into rejoicing.

He turns defeat into victory. Destruction into spring bloom. And shame into gratitude.

So let me begin with this first statement by saying this. We all need self-control. All of us. Everyone here needs self-control.

[4:40] We need to grow in our impulse control. And our ability to say no, to unchecked desires, to say yes to Jesus. And so, impulse control shows up in a variety of different ways.

So, for example, there are your passions, your loves. Anger is a passion. Anger is a passion. And unchecked anger will, if that rules you, it will wreak ruin in your life, and in a family, even in a church, even in a country.

So, we all need self-control because many of us are anger, and our anger gets the better of us. But it's just not with our impulsive passions.

It's with our appetites. Many of us have unrestrained appetites when it comes to food. You look to food for comfort and deliverance, refuge, for accumulating money.

You have an appetite for sexual lust that you can't fill. You have an appetite for sleep. You just can't get enough of it. You have an appetite for ease.

[5:56] And on the flip side of that, an appetite for productivity and control. All of these can get blown out of portion and rule us. We have appetites for the approval of man.

We have appetites for entertainment because our biggest threat is boredom. We have appetites for speeding in our cars.

Appetites to speak a choice morsel of gossip with our mouth that goes down deep. That's a proverb. We are people that can be ruled by our appetites.

And some of those appetites I just named to you, in and of themselves, they're good. They're fine. It's when they go disproportional and that they rule us that it will wreak ruin in our lives.

And it's just not passions and appetites. It's even thoughts. Maybe you can relate with some of these undiagnosed thoughts in your head.

[7:07] They're falsehoods about God. Many of us think that God is distant. That God is uncaring. That he's in a perpetual state of disappointment with us.

And that's how we live. But it's not true. That's not what God's word says. That's how God says about his posture towards whom he has redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

But it's not just unchecked thoughts about God. It's unchecked thoughts about ourselves. Many of us who are watching right now, listening, you have this profound sense that you will never measure up.

Or you have this other sense that you're better than anybody else. You just won't say it. What's interesting about human beings is we're all this interesting mix of both.

We have deep insecurities as well as these moments of overconfidence. And they're just not true. And then we have unchallenged, undiagnosed thoughts about others.

[8:18] We see someone post something on Facebook that we don't like. We rush to judgment about that person. We see that person now as an enemy. And now we want that person punished somehow.

Unchecked. And it moves really fast. We are people who need self-control. These passions and appetites and thoughts, here's what happens.

When they're unchecked and unrestrained, they will inform the way that you live your life. They will form a way of being. And it forms character.

And what the Bible is clear to say is that this is foolishness. Proverbs 4.23 says, Guard your heart above all else, for from it flow the wellsprings of life.

We must guard our hearts. Exercise self-control. More often than not, these unchecked, unrestrained, undiagnosed, unchallenged passions, appetites, and thoughts, they'll lead to ruin.

[9:42] Personally, in our relationships, in a church, in a country. A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

It's a picture of folly. It's a picture of ruin. So let me ask you a question by show of hands. Who needs self-control? Everybody.

Everybody. So here's how we're going to start applying this. Right now, with where you're sitting, would you please answer this question to yourself?

What is one specific area? Maybe it's a passion, anger. Maybe it's an appetite, greed. Maybe it's a thought about God.

What is one specific area that is regularly ruling your heart and reaping some kind of ruin in your life?

[10:42] Identify that one particular area right now. And if you've got a pen, write it down. Put it down. And now, as we've done this, I'm just going to pause the sermon.

And now let's pray together. God in heaven, we are a people in desperate need of self-control. And God, we're trusting that you are in this process right now of identifying specific areas of our life. That you want to pour your grace of self-control onto and change us, transform us. So now, God, with this thing in front of us that we've identified, we ask, God, would you help us now? Would you help us to think your thoughts about this? Would you help us to grow in this? Would you help us to treasure Christ in light of this? We need your help. And Lord Jesus, we look to you. It's in your name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Now, the proverb says, a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. Right? Well, the opposite is true.

[11:46] A man with self-control, a woman with self-control, is like a city defended because of fortified walls. And God has a fortifying grace for all of us, brothers and sisters, to strengthen us in this area of self-control.

And so now we've talked about the need for self-control. Now I want to get at the heart of self-control. Number two, what's at the heart of self-control?

And it's in one word. At the heart of self-control is worship. Worship is at the heart of self-control. What rules your heart controls your life. There was a time when the computing world was divided into two camps. There was Apple and there was PC.

You're running a Mac operating system or you're running a Windows operating system. And an operating system, as I've told you before, is what governs the applications of a computer.

[12:54] Now, when it comes to human beings, there are basically two human operating systems of the heart. And these operating systems, these two different operating systems, they both run an application called self-control.

But they're very different versions of self-control. So, the first kind of human operating system is called the godless operating system of the flesh.

And it's running a worldly version of self-control. And here's what is characteristic of this version. At the heart of this worldly version of self-control is a worship of oneself.

It's all about me. It's self-dependent. It's self-defined. What I think I need most. Self-directed. I'm going to pick the words that I want to hear in order to go get it.

And self-delighting. It's about my indulgence. And this is the fatal flaw of this particular operating system.

[14:03] It's idolatrous. Self is at the heart of it. Contrasting to this is the godward operating system of faith.

At the heart of this operating system is a fear of the Lord. Is of recognizing that our God, he is the creator. And he's the ruler.

And he's the savior. And he's the judge. And as we watch the unfolding of scripture, what we see in the New Testament is Jesus is the creator.

Jesus is the ruler of all. All things have been put under his feet. Jesus is the savior of all. And Jesus is the judge of all. And so at the heart of this godward operating system is a faith in the living God. A fear of the Lord or a treasuring of Jesus Christ. And what we see of this operating system, it's god-dependent. I'm not going to change on my own strength.

[15:06] It's god by his spirit changing me. It's god-defined. His word defines what I need. It's god-directed. His word directs me in the way I should go. And it's god-delighting above all else.

Whether I eat or whether you drink, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. It's all about God. And what this is described, it's called a fountain of life.

If you would open up your Bibles, turn to now Proverbs 14, 27. We have a distinction between operating systems.

Listen to this. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. That one may turn away from the snares of death.

A godless operating system of the flesh is fatal. It leads to death. But a godward operating system of faith, where fear of the Lord, treasuring Jesus, is ruling your heart, it will turn you from that.

[16:10] It's a source of life. Now here's why this matters. It's all about worship.

Every morning you wake up, and you wake up into a default operating system, and it's not godward. It's typically godless. You wake up kind of bent on the flesh, self-dependent, self-defined, self-directed, self-indulging.

And what Jesus is clear to say is that you must deny all these selves in order for you to take up your cross and follow him and treasure him.

What this is is just the run-of-the-mill daily repentance and faith of following Jesus Christ. It's all about discipleship.

God-dependent. God-defined. God-directed. God-delighting. At the heart of self-control is worship.

[17:18] Who you treasure most. God-dependent. So every day, multiple times a day, you are faced with a decision. Who you're going to treasure.

And out of that treasuring, you will exercise some version of self-control, impulse control. And the two choices you have are yourself and the risen Christ.

A worldly self-control or a biblical self-control. So let me ask you a question now. You've already identified something that you need to grow in self-control, right?

Let me ask you this. What do you think will happen if you begin to treasure Jesus more in light of that passion or appetite or thought?

What will happen? Change is a-coming. That's what's going to happen. The call to self-control is first and foremost a call to worship.

[18:28] A call to worship the one true God. A call to fear him above all else. A call to treasure Jesus like nothing else. And now that's where I want to bring you to three.

How to grow in self-control. A biblical self-control. There's two parts to this. How to grow biblical self-control part one. That's three.

How to grow in self-control part two. That's the fourth point. So bear with me in this third point. How do we grow in biblical self-control?

Well, let's make sure we're working on the right definition of self-control. Biblical self-control is a Christ-treasuring impulse control. I love Jesus.

I love Jesus. Delight in him so much. My affections for him. My delight in him. My want to bring glory to him. It exceeds any other passion, appetite, or thought in my life.

[19:24] It's a battle of delights. It's a battle of pleasures. It's a battle of treasures. And so what this means is self-control always starts with treasuring Jesus.

It always begins with Jesus. Nowhere in your Bible is self-control raised and then immediately goes from self-control to saying, okay, now here is your diet plan.

Or here is your financial stewardship plan. Or here is your time management plan. Or here is your exercise regimen. What your Bible will always do when it comes to self-control, it links governing your affections to theology.

It's theology. What you believe about God lived out in your decisions that reign in your passions.

The question that you need to be asking this morning is this.

Am I treasuring Jesus in the way he deserves? That's the question. Am I seeing and savoring Jesus for the glory and wonder that he is?

[20:40] And I think all of us would say, oh, we have room to grow. That's the place to start so. So maybe you're wondering, well, how do I do that? Well, you need to go to the ones of your Bible.

The ones. Here's what I mean. John chapter 1, 1 through 18. Colossians chapter 1, 15 through 20. Hebrews chapter 1, 3 through 4.

Revelation chapter 1, 12 through 18. Joshua chapter 1, 5 through 9. And you want to link that to Jude chapter 1, verse 5. That will blow your socks off about Jesus.

All of these passages portray Jesus as a big Jesus, as a wonder, as a glory. Especially the one in Revelation chapter 1.

Jesus is a risen, radiant, and reigning Christ. He will take your breath away. So the question is, how big is your Jesus? And is it in keeping with what the scriptures have revealed about Jesus?

[21:46] That's the place to start. In Titus chapter 2, if you want to turn there quickly, the apostle Paul raises the issue of self-control. And he does it by first pointing to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

He says, for the grace of God. This is chapter 2, verse 11 through 13. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. That's a reference to Jesus.

And then it goes on to say, this grace training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. And to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a people for his own possession. Who are zealous for good works. There's a lot there. But what it's clear is this. Our self-control is lived out in light of who Jesus is.

In light of his first coming. In which he lived a perfect life of self-control. Jesus, who is fully God and fully man. Never once sinned in his passions.

[22:51] Never once sinned in his appetites. Never once had an unbiblical thought about himself, God, or others. Everything was unmarked, pleasing to God. And this perfect man of self-control.

He died on the cross for all of us who blow it regularly when it comes to our lack of self-control. He died to radically change ruinous people into rejoicing worshipers.

That's why he came. And not only did he come, he's going to come again. And when he comes back, this blessed hope of ours, do you know what he's going to do?

He's going to completely eradicate our sinful nature. I think there's going to be some kind of need for self-control and glory. I don't know what for.

But it's not to restrain our sin because it won't be there. It's all about Jesus. About his first coming and his second coming. In this present age we live in between, we are to live out self-control in light of who he is.

[24:00] How to grow in self-control? Starts with worshiping Jesus. Big Jesus. Go to the ones. But what we also see in Titus chapter 2, 11 through 13, and I'm going to just be really brief, is what I call the Christian two-step.

The Christian two-step is a renouncing and an embracing. It is a putting off and a putting on. We see it in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3.

And it's here in Titus chapter 2 as well. We read this. For this grace is a period bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce, put off passions, evil desires, worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright lives in this present age.

What this grace of God in treasuring Jesus does for us is it helps us to say no to sinful desires for Jesus and to say yes to God's plan for our lives for Jesus, to Jesus, to obey him.

We are making multiple decisions every day. And what's governing our heart is being played out in those decisions we make. And so what we must do is treasure Jesus above all else.

[25:22] Now, here are a couple questions. What does that look like for you?

What does it look like for you to begin treasuring Jesus every day? I would encourage you to go to the ones. John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, Revelation 1, Joshua 1, Jude 1, 5.

Get these big pictures of Jesus. That will stir your heart towards him. Pray. Ask the Father to pour out the Holy Spirit whose defined purpose is to glorify Jesus.

Ask God to pour out his Spirit on you to see and savor and delight in and treasure Jesus for who he is. Start your day that way.

In worship of our Savior. Now, the second question is more specific. This passion that you've identified, this appetite, this thought that rules you and brings ruin to your life.

[26:34] What does it look like when you treasure Jesus? What does it look like for you to say no to that? What must you do? Do you need to speak it out loud?

No, I'm not going to speed right now. No, I'm not going to look lustfully at this person. No, I'm not going to entertain this thought or that feeling or that passion.

And what does it look like to say yes to Jesus? To do the Christian two-step of renouncing, of denial, of putting something to death, and saying yes to the Spirit of God at work in you.

Now, if you've identified something and you're at a loss, like I have no idea what to do, I'd love to talk to you about this after the service and pray with you. But I just want to say right now, a call to self-control is a call to treasure Christ first and foremost above all else.

That will help you to say no and to say yes. The fourth point, how to grow in biblical self-control.

[27:41] I am going to be brief and amazing on this point. Because based on what you've heard me say so far, you may draw the conclusion that, hey, growing in self-control is just a me and Jesus thing.

And you know what? You're right to a certain degree. No one but you can decide to live for Jesus day in and day out. I can't make that decision for you. Your spouse, your mom, your dad, they can't make that decision for you.

You must make that decision yourself day in and day out. But you're not alone. Proverbs 13, 20. If you want to turn there in your Bible. I love this verse.

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. But the companion of fools will suffer harm, ruin, devastation. Like a city broken into and left without walls.

What you want to do is saddle up next to other brothers and sisters who are looking to treasure Jesus and live out a biblical self-control.

[28:49] And when you surround yourself with those who fear God that way, you're going to grow as well. You're going to get called up to living for Jesus by those around you.

It is a wonderful, godly momentum that's generated when you run and walk with people through life who have the same aim to treasure Jesus above all else.

Think of it as team discipleship. Following Jesus. Treasuring Jesus together. That's why we do life groups.

So the question is, are you in close association with others who are calling you to follow Jesus with them? Are you being provoked?

Are there people speaking into your life who are correcting and rebuking you and saying, don't, don't, don't swerve from treasuring Jesus or they're comforting you? The call to self-control is a call to treasure Christ above all else and to do that with others of like-hearted passion for Christ.

[30:05] Five, the wise produce of self-control. What happens when people exercise biblical self-control?

What will happen? Proverbs 25, 28. Remember, a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. The opposite is true. A man or woman with self-control, those who treasure Jesus and are saying no and saying yes for the glory of Jesus, that person is like a city defended with fortified walls.

Here's the effect. When we step out in faith, treasuring Jesus, calling on the Holy Spirit to empower us, God in his grace will transform anger into gentleness.

He's got a power to do that. He will transform lust into fidelity, devotion. He will transform greed into generosity.

He will transform fear and anxiety into a persevering faith in the midst of hardship. It is what the Holy Spirit has indwelt us and is seeking to produce in us because self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

[31:29] But we must make the effort to deny ourselves daily to follow Jesus. So what will happen as we seek together, individually and as a church, biblical self-control by treasuring Jesus?

Transformation will happen. We'll be changed into the likeness of Jesus together. And instead of sin, ruling hearts resulting in all sorts of ruin, God's grace poured out will redeem, will transform. We will experience God's blessing and there will be profound unity within our church. Proverbs 3.13 talk about the blessed man who finds wisdom.

What we're describing is this treasuring Jesus and saying no and saying yes out of that treasure. That's wisdom.

That's crafting a life that fears the Lord, that treasures Jesus. That's the one that fears the Lord, that treasures the Lord, that treasures the Lord, imagine that, what God can do in you.

[33:15] It's a wonderful thought. And God is able to do that. The call to self-control is a call to treasure Christ.

I started off this sermon by talking about Aleppo. It's a city in ruin right now. It's just a bunch of rubble.

And it's a picture of what a lack of self-control does to people. It leaves us in ruin. But this grace that we've been talking about, this kindness of God, this gift of self-control offered to us by the Spirit of God, He is wanting to produce this in us.

Could you imagine the before and after picture of a church that has been radically changed by treasuring Jesus together?

Father, we will stand out. We will be light. We will be salt. We will generate from the Spirit of God in us a unity and a momentum unto godliness.

[34:32] I'm convinced that the more self-control we experience as an outworking of the Spirit, the more joy we will experience as a church, the more happiness in our great God.

It doesn't come without hardship and pain. There are decisions to be made. Self-control requires self-denial. But it's all for Jesus.

This morning I've sought to call you to self-control. But I've really sought to call you to treasure Jesus above all else. Let's do this together.

For the glory of His name. Let's pray. God in heaven, My words are so weak. But Your word is Your power.

God, would You take what has been spoken and would You press us now into our hearts. Spirit of the living God, would You fall afresh upon us?

[35:42] Would You bring about conviction, not guilt and condemnation, but exposure, areas where You, our Holy Father, are wanting to change us for our good that we would share in Your holiness.

God, I pray that You would do a work in which You make us holy. And with that holiness comes a happiness as we share in the harvest that You're looking to reap in us.

God, would You now receive our singing in response to what You have spoken. It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.