

The idea of a goal, an ultimate aim, calling us to a hard road of self-denial—the idea, in other words, that Jesus of Nazareth meant what he said when he spoke of people taking up their cross to follow him!—has been quietly removed from the record, not only of secular Western life but also, extraordinarily, of a fair amount of Christian discourse.

At a less obvious but perhaps still more insidious level, all this goes with that element in cultures both ancient and modern which is generally called “Gnosis” or “Gnosticism.” This, loosely, involves the idea that there is a spark of light hidden deep within us—or at least within some of us. This hidden spark (it is supposed) is often buried deep underneath layers of social and cultural conditioning, and even layers of what we ourselves assume to be “who we really are.”

Once this spark has been revealed, however, it takes precedence over everything else, trumping every rule, every happiness calculation, and certainly every virtue, classical or otherwise. Whatever we deeply, most truly find within ourselves must be right. My heart is telling me how it is, and I must go with my heart. That is the “guiding light” at the deep center of my true self. And this, many people today have been taught and seriously believe, is what Jesus of Nazareth came to model and to teach. That is the message not only of The Da Vinci Code and a good many other popular page-turners, but also of many more serious writers and scholars. It is, after all, the message that many people very much want to hear.

In its corporate version, this kind of philosophy has dominated a good deal of our world. Not for nothing did the great intellectual and cultural revolution of the second half of the eighteenth century call itself “the Enlightenment.” Western Europe and North America had “discovered who they really were.” They were a race set apart, possessing new knowledge, skills, and techniques which not only could be expressed in terms of conquest of those less “enlightened,” but positively demanded to be so exploited.

... But in its individual version, the Gnosticism of the last two centuries has embedded deep within our imaginations the assumption...that “being true to oneself” is the central human command, the central (even) “religious” imperative, the central goal and task of every human being, the Holy Grail of personal development. That is simply how millions of people today see themselves and the world.

- N.T. Wright, *After You Believe*, 53-54.

In a world in which *doing* things (doing everything) has become a sign of authority, we struggle to understand that there are situations in which *not doing something* is a far greater signifier of power. Joseph does not commit adultery with Potiphar’s wife; Jesus does not command stones to turn into bread—these non-acts display the greatest degree of power. To have done any one of these would have been not powerful but weak, even sinful. Self-control is not a weakness but a sign that one is more powerful than those who cannot control themselves or their actions.

-Matthew Barret, *None Greater*, 191.

# GALATIANS 5



## THE FRUITFUL LIFE

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**; against such things there is no law.*  
**Galatians 5:22-23**

What does real growth and change look like? The Bible describes an organic process in which the quality of Jesus’ own life is cultivated, by his Spirit, in the lives of his followers. This quality of life is not a list of virtues that we accomplish but “fruit” produced in us by the Holy Spirit as we actively delight in and rest in Jesus. While this fruit has many dimensions, each dimension grows in relationship to the others to increasingly form us as a whole person.

This “fruit” is the type of life we were originally designed to live but is now produced against the backdrop of a world marred by sin. As this fruit develops, it blesses those around us and creates a community that is a glimpse of the world to come—a community filled with individuals who are both unique in themselves and being conformed to the image of Jesus.

Join us this Fall as we explore how this life of Jesus is cultivated in the life of his people and how this may lead you to a more Christlike version of yourself.

# The Freedom of Self-Control

December 17, 2023 | Galatians 5:22-23 | Pastor Roger Williams

This above all—to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

- Polonius (*"the rambling fool"*), *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 3.

## The Holy Spirit cultivates self-control for our freedom and the good of others.

*Self-control: control of the self, the right ordering of loves and desires*

### The freedom of self-control...

**2 Corinthians 5** <sup>17</sup>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

**Romans 7:15-8:2** <sup>15</sup>For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup>So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup>So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup>but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

### in a world of autonomy...

**1 John 2** <sup>15</sup>Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world, *the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life,* is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world is passing away and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever. (*"lust" = lit: "over-desires"*)

### Genesis 3

<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree *was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,* she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

### for the sake of others...

### Galatians 5

<sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

### ...by the power of Jesus.

### Titus 2

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup>waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup>who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.