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Self-Control, a Fruit of the Spirit - P6

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls” (Proverbs 25:28 ESV).

Our thought-life is more important than we think. Sure, maybe you keep from committing the sin you are thinking about, but you still are thinking about it. Is that so bad? Its not like its real sin, after all, right?

Jesus took a pin and popped that thought bubble when He said, *“everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28). If the thought is intent, it is sin, because God cares about what’s going on in your heart and mind. It’s important to Him, because it is the real you. Just so, Lucifer imagined a world without God’s judgment—a world where he was free to do as he wanted without repercussions: *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will make myself like the Most High’”* (Isaiah 14:13-14). Lucifer thoughts were intending sin.

When we contemplate sin, we are fantasizing of a place and time without God’s authority and judgment—we want to get away with it. In this way, all sinful thoughts are rebellious, and *“rebellion is as the sin of divination”* (1 Sam. 15:23). Why divination? Because we’re bending an eager ear to a different spirit (satan) telling us what we want to hear: *“You have a right to do what you want.”*

But perhaps you say, *“Yes, that’s why I exercise self-control over my thoughts.”* God’s Word speaks about self-control, doesn’t it? Yes, but it is self-control by the Holy Spirit, which is very different from human self-control. In human self-control you may bite your tongue, but the words or thoughts are still muttering in the bottom of your mind long af-

terwards. Human self-control tries to control the “volcano” with will-power. We chain the flesh in a dungeon deep down, but it stays alive down there. The anger, bitterness, lust, and all things of the flesh fester inside you—it doesn’t really go away, it just subsides below the surface, waiting for a sudden urge to break free or the prison walls to crumble around it. This sort of man is double-minded. His “public” self is different from what goes on in his basement. From society’s perspective, this may be acceptable, but there is a problem.

Old age, stress, alcohol, drugs, pain, trials, etc, all lower our will-power and self-control. It weakens them like acid corroding chains until people see what’s really going on beneath our public faces when the flesh snaps those chains and rises to the surface. When our strength fails us, all the ugliness we’ve tried to keep hidden emerges like a prison riot.

This is not what God means by self-control. God’s self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), *“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”* (2 Tim. 1:7). With Godly self-control, you may also bite your tongue, but you make a practice of giving the anger, bitterness, or lust over to the Lord to deaden it, for *“those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal. 5:24). Here, the flesh is being put to death and not simply chained up in a dungeon, festering beneath the surface. In this way, we ought to continually practice self-control by the Spirit, that we would get better at “purifying” sinful thoughts and intents by handing them over to Him to be put to death, before they take residence in us.

In your thoughts, *“submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded”* (James 4:8). Even so, Amen.

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