

CHARACTER CRUNCH

PART 1: SELF-CONTROL

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Most of us place high value on good character. We debate about it in our elected officials, expect it from our spiritual leaders and evaluate it in everyone around us. We want to be known for it, and we want to instill it in our children. Even so, we find that our good character tends to break down during “crunch time” – when the pressure is on and when things are going wrong. We struggle during the tough times because we fail to “exercise” the traits that make up good character during our normal, everyday lives when pressures and expectations are more manageable.

Self-control is a key character trait that must be exercised regularly if it is to be effective in our lives, and there are two basic laws that govern it...

The 1st Law of Self-Control

Without it, God cannot bless us.

The 2nd Law of Self-Control

We must limit ourselves in one area to gain freedom in another.

So, while self-control is...

It is also...

- Limiting
- Restraining
- Liberating
- Enabling

Since we know that by exhibiting self-control we will gain freedom, then why do we consistently choose to avoid it? Paul asks a similar question in the book of Romans...

Romans 7:14-15 (Msg) ...*“I know that all God’s commands are spiritual, but I’m not. Isn’t this also your experience?” Yes. I’m full of myself—after all, I’ve spent a long time in sin’s prison. [15] What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise.”*

The answer...

We allow our self-control to erode. The erosion process happens in 3 steps:

Psalms 1:1 (Msg) *“How well God must like you—you don’t hang out at Sin Saloon, you don’t slink along Dead-End Road, you don’t go to Smart-Mouth College.”*

1. Attention - our sinful thoughts are hostile to God.

Romans 8:7 (Msg) *“Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing.”*

2. Attraction - our sinful desires war against our souls.

1 Peter 2:11 (Msg) *“Friends, this world is not your home, so don’t make yourselves cozy in it. Don’t indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.”*

3. Action - our sinful acts are the result of our sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16-21 (Msg) *“My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God’s Spirit. Then you won’t feed the compulsions of selfishness. [17] For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. [18] Why don’t you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence? [19] It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; [20] trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; [21] the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn’t the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God’s kingdom.”*

If we allow ourselves total freedom in these three areas, the result will be addiction.

Galatians 6:8 (Msg) *“The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*

Five Steps to Re-gaining Self Control

1. Know Christ as your Savior.
2. Know His word as your truth.
3. Know your giftedness and use it.
4. Know your weaknesses and don’t entertain them.
5. Know believers who will support and hold you accountable.