

# "Self-Discipline"

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:5-13

May the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ lead you to contemplate and appreciate the priceless gift that was thereby earned for you – the forgiveness of your sins and Eternal Life. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The problem with living in a free country is all that freedom. Life in a free and independent culture requires many things of its citizens if such a system has any chance of working; things like self-control, honor, integrity, obedience, and, perhaps most important of all, self-discipline. These things – almost by their very definition – cannot be legislated or forced upon us. They have to come from within the citizens themselves. They have to be practiced by parents and taught from little on to their children. It all starts with little things, like making beds, brushing teeth, and keeping a room neat. That's where it starts, but it never ends there. In fact self-discipline never ends at all. As adults you will need to be able to consistently determine that line where alcohol use becomes alcohol abuse; when eating becomes gluttony and relaxation becomes slothfulness. Adults have to learn to say no to the new toys, tools, and clothes that will forever beg to be owned. No to temptation, yes to devotions; no to bad language, yes to exercise; no to sinful fantasies, yet to prayer. In short, nearly every moment of every day we can expect to be confronted with choices that have to be made with a rather rigid self-discipline firmly in place. No free society can long survive without it. What is more, no Christian can long remain in the Christian faith without it.

While we are not damned because of our sins – since we are now saved by faith in Jesus Christ, who has paid the penalty for all sin in full – sin that remains in the human heart will always act like an acid or cancer that gradually and inexorably destroys saving faith. Just as a lack of self-discipline during the workweek leads to financial failure, so also lack of self-discipline on Saturday night leads to failure on Sunday morning. Parents who lack self-discipline in bringing up their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord can fully expect adult children who have little or no time for church or religion.

Our God, of course, knows all about this, which is why he didn't leave us without both warnings and examples. Our text for this morning speaks of this very thing. That text is found recorded in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, the Tenth Chapter:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:5-13** *But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. <sup>7</sup> And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." <sup>8</sup> Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; <sup>9</sup> nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup> nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

So far the words of our texts. Fully confident that these are indeed the very words of God, and confident that he will work powerfully through these words in our hearts this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

If I were to ask you to name the individual who in your life has been the best Christian example, the Christian individual you most admire and would most like to imitate or emulate, whom would you pick? Take a moment to answer that question in your own mind.

Now ask yourself what it is (or was it) about that individual that led you to pick him or her? No doubt if we were all to make lists of the attributes we considered essential in making such a choice there would be striking similarities among the various lists. A strong faith in Jesus Christ would probably top most lists, but my guess is that our topic for this morning, self-discipline, would also rank very high. We think of our top mentors, our shining Christian examples, as special not because they were never burdened, tempted, or pressured, but because they demonstrated the ability to maintain their balance, serenity, and humility even in the midst of such trials. They are our heroes in the faith not because they were never refined in the fires of life, but because they were given the grace to sing praise to God even while they suffered. We seek to emulate them not because they were never tempted, but precisely because they *were* tempted, and yet

demonstrated the rare ability to say no to themselves and to their natural passions. In other words, they demonstrated self-control. A good Christian man or woman is not one who has no evil thoughts or inclinations; it is rather one who consistently says no.

Obviously every single Christian here this morning would wholeheartedly agree that he wants to follow the example of Jesus Christ, yet as we follow our Lord we seek to do so in a manner that is pleasing to him. It is possible, in other words, to follow, and yet to follow wrongly. You would not, for example, be pleased with your son if you told him to follow you quietly through the store while you did your shopping, only to find that while he did follow quietly, he did so while kicking the other shoppers in the shins as they passed by. So also "following Jesus" means not only that we believe that he died for our sins on the cross, but also that we acknowledge his will as our guiding directive in the moment by moment decisions of life. That is why we focus not only on following our Lord, but also on the characteristics we ought to demonstrate as we follow - specifically this morning, self-discipline.

Peter provided something of a negative example for us during Holy Week. You will recall that when Jesus was arrested, all of his disciples fled in fear. Apparently Peter and John did not flee far, since they followed Jesus at a distance and eventually were allowed to pass through the gate and into the compound of the High Priest Caiaphas. There Peter waited while Jesus was questioned. That proved to be both the good news and the bad news as far as Peter was concerned. The good news was that Peter was there to witness what was going to happen to Jesus. The bad news... was that Peter was there to witness what was going to happen to Jesus. That, in other words, was the bad news as well as the good news because Peter found himself in a situation he simply could not handle - surrounded by the enemies of his Lord. He found himself in hostile territory. Though he thought himself strong enough to survive in such an environment and under such circumstances, he was tragically mistaken.

Peter made the same mistake we tend to make. He mistook good intentions for true self-control. This was exactly the same mistake the Children of Israel made when they first entered the Promised Land under Joshua. Remember Joshua's famous declaration: **"As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."** What was the response from the people? *So will we!* Yet our text gives us a partial list of the miserable failures on the part of these same Jews. What happened? What went wrong? How is it they demonstrated such profound lack of self-discipline? The simple truth is that all apparently believed that *intending* to do the right thing ensured that they would also therefore *do the right thing*. They

believed that knowing the right thing and wanting to do the right thing would somehow magically provide also the ability to *do* the right thing. Surely the intentions of the Jews were good. Surely Peter's intentions were good. Yet all fell victim to what is still today a common fallacy about self-discipline. In fact it is probably safe to say that the *biggest* misconception about self-discipline is the understanding of the term itself. (Nor are Christians immune from this misunderstanding.)

When the world hears the term "self-discipline" or "self-control" they hear the term as though "self" is the subject rather than the object; that is, they imagine that "self" is the thing doing the controlling, when in fact "self" is that which needs to be controlled, the entity that needs to be disciplined. At the very least the unbelievers believe that "self" is both the subject and the object, that an individual must control "self" *by* "self." That is also why the world does such a poor job when it comes to self-discipline (or self-help of any kind, really). The Old Adam "self" can never be counted upon to accomplish anything truly good and God pleasing. As Paul says, ***"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells."***

Thus Peter spoke and acted as though he had unlimited reserves of self-discipline - simply because he was determined to do the right thing. He bragged that he would never forsake Jesus, even if all others did forsake him. What he found in reality was that his own personal reserves of self-discipline and determination could not even stand up to the questions of a couple of servant girls. Learn this lesson well, for our own personal reserves of inner strength and resolve are equally as unreliable. Our text gives us fair warning: ***"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."*** And again, ***"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."***

The Bible *does* advocate self-control, but not control *by* self. The Word of God promotes control of self by the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace in us. There is where the real power lies. Note that our text points away from the power of man and to the power of God when it says, ***"God is faithful."*** Not man, God. ***"God is faithful."*** The new man in us certainly is willing enough, but on our own, by our own strength and determination, we fit Paul's description of himself when he said, ***"The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."*** Add to this the fact that we all have the same pride and self-confidence that got Peter into all that trouble, and you have a recipe for consistent disaster. I wonder, for

example, how many of us would have done any better than Peter did under those circumstances there in the courtyard. How many of us would have withered in the face of the servant girl's questioning? The answer is as many as trusted in "self" rather than in the power and strength of God the Holy Spirit. You will recall Jesus' own words of caution to Peter and the other disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** (Matthew 26:41)

Our Lord Jesus, on the other hand, gave us a different example - which is why he will always be our only completely reliable example. Think of all that our Savior suffered for us - the ridicule, the false accusations, the blasphemy, the torture, the shame, even hell itself. Yet never once did he lose his composure. Never once did he lose his self-control or self-discipline. Through it all he remained quiet, unperturbed, on track, and focused. This is exactly what the prophecies about this man told us to expect. Isaiah, for example, foretold in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of his Book: **"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."** Note also that Jesus demonstrated that self-control in the face of the greatest injustice ever witnessed. The only perfect, truly innocent man the world has ever known was sentenced to death for that which he never did. He was condemned because of *our* sins, yours and mine. The self-discipline shown by our Lord was for us, for our salvation. It was the self-discipline that led him to the cross.

That's the kind of Lord we have - perfect, holy, self-sacrificing, loving. Now ask yourself what kind of love you have returned for the love shown by our Lord Jesus? What kind of self-control are you able to muster out of thanks for what he has done for you? Take another look at our text and read the list of atrocities committed by the Jews - the very things recorded as examples to instruct and warn us: idolatry, carousing, sexual impurity, tempting the Lord, and complaining. How shameful that these, rather than self-control, are the very things into which we still fall.

Dear Christians the same Lord who suffered so much to win our salvation deserves better from his children. At the very least our Lord deserves to see his children practice self-control, and the truly exciting news is that this is a gift that the Holy Spirit longs to work in us, a strength he longs to give us. In fact it is right there for the asking. So ask him for it. Temptation is everywhere and our enemies are powerful, therefore such self-discipline will prove a constant struggle and success can only come

through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us. Pray earnestly therefore for Godly self-discipline. Nothing but good can come from it.

And then, by all means, teach the same to your children. More than just our society depends on it. Eternity itself - for them and for us - hangs in the balance. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 33:12-20** Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.'"<sup>13</sup> "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation *is* Your people."<sup>14</sup> And He said, "My Presence will go *with you*, and I will give you rest."<sup>15</sup> Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here."<sup>16</sup> "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth."<sup>17</sup> ¶ So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."<sup>18</sup> And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."<sup>19</sup> Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."<sup>20</sup> But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Luke 13:1-9** There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."<sup>2</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"<sup>3</sup> "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."<sup>4</sup> "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?"<sup>5</sup> "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."<sup>6</sup> He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none."<sup>7</sup> "Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?'"<sup>8</sup> "But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.'<sup>9</sup> 'And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday in Lent – March 7, 2010**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn -#421- (Red Hymnal)

"Come Follow Me, the Savior Spake"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Exodus 33:12-20) Moses' relationship with God was indeed unique and special. We note here especially how Moses relied not on himself and his own powers and abilities, but on the power and presence of his Lord. Though our relationship with God might not be exactly the same today, our need for our Lord's presence and power among us is just as great.

## Psalm of the Day: Psalm 45 (Brown Hymnal page 32)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Luke 13:1-9) The fact that bad things happen to a human being is never a valid indication of the moral character of that individual. This is Jesus' message in this reading from Luke's Gospel. Christians are to use hard times as reminders to bear fruit for the Lord before the harvest is gathered. We are also to thank our God for the good times, but never to use his blessings as justification for sin.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#153- (Red Hymnal)

"Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 10:5-13 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Self-Discipline"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn -#535- (Verses 1-6 & 9) (Red Hymnal)

"Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing"

## The Offering (Hymn #572, Verses 1 & 4)

## The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn -#47- (Red Hymnal)

"Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance - Last Sunday (57) 2010 Average (50) Wednesday (37)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-8:45 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC** – Jamestown has called Pastor James Naumann of Valentine, NE. Pastor Joel Fleischer is considering the calls to Clarkston and Orofino.

**Confirmation Time Changes** – Confirmation students and parents remember that Confirmation Classes have been moved to Mondays at 6:00 p.m. until after Easter.

**ILC Publicity Insert** – Please consult the entry table for updates on the ILC Academic Center Building Project. While the building has been completed and is proving a tremendous asset to the life and education of our CLC school, its students and faculty, regular payments need to be made to truly complete the project. Please consider regular contributions to this end.

**CLC History Books** – Those who have preordered are asked to submit payment. The books should be delivered one week from tomorrow.

**CLC Grade School Tournament** – The annual CLC basketball tournament in Eau Claire is scheduled for next weekend. One eligible player from Bismarck is scheduled to participate.

**Daylight Savings Time** – A reminder that DST begins next Saturday. Turn your clocks ahead one hour.