

# "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, well, 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 commanded. They have to be provided by 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 teaching children to tend to chores and brush their teeth *without having to be told or supervised*. Things like learning to do the right thing, even when no one is watching or will ever know. That's where it starts, but it never ends there. In fact the need for self-discipline *never* ends. Adults need to be able to consistently determine that line where alcohol use becomes alcohol abuse; when eating becomes gluttony and relaxation becomes laziness. 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, yes to prayer. In short, nearly every moment of every day we can expect to be confronted with choices that have to be made under a rather rigidly imposed self-discipline. 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 grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who has paid the penalty for all sin in full – sin that is retained as a pet in the human heart will always gnaw away at the faith that saves; it acts like a cancer or parasite that gradually and inexorably destroys its host. For example, skipping church occasionally, just because you don't feel like going, leads invariably to missing more than attending, and eventually to spiritual starvation. Putting off Bible reading and family devotions until it is more convenient invariably means it never happens.

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 to this, to the need for Christian self-discipline. That text is found recorded in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, the Tenth Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:5-13** *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> ¶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, <sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

This is God's Word. Fully confident that God himself is the author, and confident that he will work powerfully through these words in our hearts this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Our text talks about examples, albeit *negative* examples. 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) about that individual that led you to pick him or her? No doubt if we all made a list of the attributes we considered essential there would be striking similarities. A strong faith in Jesus Christ would be a given, but my guess is that our topic for this morning, self-discipline, would also rank very high. We think of our 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 tested or 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 or self-discipline. A good Christian man or woman is not one who has no evil thoughts or inclinations; it is rather one who has learned how to deny those impulses.

Obviously every single Christian here this morning would wholeheartedly agree that he or she wants to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The problem is that our society has developed some strange ideas on what "following Jesus" looks like. 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. 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 also fled, but not far, since they *literally* "followed Jesus" at a distance and eventually were allowed to enter 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 both the good news and the bad news because Peter found himself in a situation where he could have supported his Savior (good), but also in a situation he simply could not handle (bad). He found himself surrounded and threatened by the enemies of his Lord - in hostile territory - and although he thought himself strong enough to survive in such an environment and under such circumstances, he was obviously mistaken.

Peter made the same mistake we tend to make. He mistook good intentions for true self-discipline. This was exactly the same mistake the Children of Israel made as they entered the Promised Land led by Joshua. Remember Joshua's famous declaration: "**As for me and my house, 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? All apparently believed

that *intending* to do the right thing ensured that they would actually *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 actually *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 concerning 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. "Self" is the entity that needs to be disciplined. At the very least, natural man believes that "self" is both the subject and the object, that an individual must control "self" *by* "self." It's no wonder then that 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 on to police itself. In fact the old Adam *never* accomplishes *anything* truly good and God pleasing. As Paul said, "**For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing.**"

That's undoubtedly why Peter spoke and acted as though he had unlimited reserves of self-discipline. I'm sure he was bound and determined to do the right thing. He bragged that he would never forsake Jesus, even if all others did just that. 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 anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**" And again, "**Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has 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. 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 want to do, I do not do; but the evil I don't**

**want to do, that's what I practice."** Add to this the fact that we all have the same character flaws 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 under those circumstances in the courtyard. How many of us would have withered in the face of the servant girl's questioning - recognizing the public scorn that would have been his had he answered differently, not to mention possible arrest, torture, and execution by crucifixion. Trusting in "self" rather than in the power and strength of God the Holy Spirit never goes well. 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 Savior, 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, and finally the divine punishment for the sum total of mankind's sin. 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 exercised by our Lord was for us, for our salvation. It was self-discipline that led him to the cross.

That's the kind of Lord we have - perfect, holy, self-sacrificing, loving. It is a mistake to suppose that even Jesus himself, as true man, could supply all the strength needed to provide the perfect sacrifice of a sinless life. Time and again we read how he mastered the Scriptures even as a young boy, how he went off by himself to pray, and how his prayers were answered by supporting angels. If Jesus himself looked outside of himself for strength and power, how foolish of us to do otherwise.

God deserves the best from his children. The truly exciting news is that self-discipline is a gift that the Holy Spirit longs to work in us, a strength he longs to give us. In Isaiah 30:20-21 we read, **"And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your**

**Teacher. <sup>21</sup> And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."** Self-discipline is there for the asking. So ask your Heavenly Father for it. Temptation is everywhere and our enemies are powerful. Success therefore can only come through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us through the Word. Go to that Word, pray for the gift of self-discipline, and the Lord will certainly grant it.

And then, by all means, teach the same to others, beginning with those most precious to you. Amen.

ESV **Exodus 33:12-20** 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 favor in my sight.' <sup>13</sup> Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too 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> And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup> For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" <sup>17</sup> ¶ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." <sup>18</sup> Moses said, "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. <sup>20</sup> But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

ESV **Luke 13:1-9** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; 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 offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." <sup>6</sup> ¶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

ESV **1 Corinthians 10:5-13** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> ¶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, <sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

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*- 1 CORINTHIANS 10:11*



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday in Lent – March 23, 2025**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 135 (Blue Hymnal)

"Christ Is Our Cornerstone"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

**The First 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. In fact Moses did not want to continue his journey to the Promised Land if the Lord was not there to guide and protect him. 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.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Blue Hymnal Page 90)

**The Second 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, nor of God's attitude toward that individual. This is Jesus' message in this reading from Luke's Gospel. Christians are supposed to thank our God for the good times, but never to turn on him in hard times. Nor are we to use his blessings as justification for ongoing sin in our lives.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Projected on Screens)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 296 (Blue Hymnal)

"In Silent Pain the Eternal Son"

## 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 Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 496 (Stanzas 1-4) Blue Hymnal)

"The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Blue Hymnal page 9)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Blue Hymnal page 14)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 186 (Blue Hymnal)

"Savior, Again to Your 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 and around the world. 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 – Sunday (37) Average (40) Wednesday (25)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service with Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Caleb Schaller has accepted the calls to the tri-parish of Grace of Valentine, NE, Peace of Mission, SD, and St. Paul's of White River, SD. Pastor Paul Krause is considering the call to Faith of St. Louis, MO. Pastor Thomas Schuetze has returned the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA.

**Lenten Services** – Our Midweek Services continue this Wednesday at 7:00 pm.

**Easter Flowers** – Today is the final day to sign up for Easter flowers.

**Church Council Notes** – The Council met on Sunday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. At their request, the Samuel Meyer family were released from membership. Treasurer Mantz reported that YTD offerings at the end of February were \$7,407 below budgeted needs. The Council is researching current copyright law to make sure we are in compliance. The purchase of the new *O Sing of Christ* hymnal was approved and usage to begin Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>. A magazine exchange was approved. Next Council meeting: Sunday, April 13<sup>th</sup>.

**New Hymnal** – This morning we begin using the new *O Sing of Christ* hymnal. All of the information on the hymn boards refers to hymns and page numbers in the blue hymnal. See the sheet on the mailbox table if you would like to order additional copies for home use.