

The Twilight Zone – Self Control

[Slide 1] In our previous class we examined the two character qualities - goodness and knowledge - from 2 Peter 1.

[Slide 2] Did everyone have a chance to complete the homework assignment from our first class?

[Slides 3-10] If not, here is a review of how to navigate our church website to find my lesson notes.

[Slide 11] Tonight we will examine "self-control" and how to go about adding this third quality to our faith. The theme scripture I chose for this discussion is from Paul's letter to Titus.

[Slide 12] Here the Apostle Paul provides instructions to Titus the Evangelist for what needed to be taught to various groups within the Churches in Crete. Self-control was something to be addressed with both the old and young alike.

[Slide 13] Through this letter God also gives us the proper perspective we need to have toward pursuing the discipline of self-control.

[Slide 14] First, I think it would be helpful to review some common Greek Dictionary definitions for *egkrateia*, which is the transliteration of the Greek word for self-control (the phonetic spelling is *eng-krat'-i-ah*).

[Slide 15] Of these, I prefer self-mastery **[CLICK]** as it depicts well the life-long process required to get a handle on this character quality.

[Slide 16] And for those who are looking at the day to day approach to self-control, perhaps this Urban Dictionary definition will convey the idea adequately.

[Slide 17] Given that this is the more senior segment of our fellowship, I thought it best to take a walk down TVLand Memory Lane to one of my favorite past TV programs of the early 60's.

[Slide 18] For those of you who share my fascination for science fiction - Do you remember Rod Serling's mantra from season four?

[Slide 19] So, with 2 Peter 1 and Titus 2 in mind, allow me to spiritualize "The Twilight Zone" mantra for our purposes.

[Slide 20] Anyway, back to the "The Twilight Zone" motif. Merriam-Webster offers this definition of twilight: an intermediate state that is not clearly defined.

[Slide 21] Thus, I chose the label "The Twilight Zone" to describe areas of our lives where we're living in ambiguity - i.e., we lack clear conviction about certain behaviors and sins in our lives.

[Slide 22] The Apostle Paul warned the first century disciples that the Devil had blinded the minds of unbelievers around them and that through their culture Satan was waging a war against their spiritual convictions. And it is certainly no different for us today. Every day I see my sinful nature wanting to take charge and rewrite the rules. For example, a sign designating 55 mph as the speed limit means that should be my minimum speed on the highway. A yellow light means I need to hurry through the intersection before it turns red. A sign stating "Do Not Touch" means I should place my finger on the wall to see if the paint is still wet.

[Slide 23] C.S. Lewis poignantly depicts Satan's efforts to derail our faith and convictions in his novel **[CLICK]**, "The Screwtape Letters." This classic is a recommended read for everyone.

[Slide 24] The contemporary writer Jerry Bridges also describes this well in his book entitled "Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate."

[Slide 25] Here Mr. Bridges addresses the fact that many Christians today have become so preoccupied with "major" sins that we have lost sight of our need to deal with our more subtle sins, like:

[CLICK x 12] Anger, Discontentment, Envy & Jealousy, Frustration, Impatience, Irritability, Judgmentalism, Pride, Selfishness, Unthankfulness, Worldliness, and Worry.

[Slide 26] The following exercise will likely demonstrate the predicament we're caught up in.

[Slide 27] How many of you believe tobacco or alcohol abuse is a sin?

[Slide 28] But why do you feel that way? What Scriptures support your convictions?

[Slide 29] Perhaps 1 Corinthians 6:19-20?

[Slide 30] Or Ephesians 5:18?

[Slide 31] Obviously, as a doctor I can speak from personal experience about the harmful effects of smoking on my surgical patients.

[Slide 32] And how alcohol consumption plays a major role in my trauma cases. I am sure most of you have a similar degree of alarm regarding why anyone would continue these behaviors when the risks are so obvious.

[Slide 33] But let's examine a third unhealthy behavior and compare it to smoking and drinking.

[Slide 34] Please follow along in this article's abstract as I highlight the researcher's conclusion.

[CLICK x 6] Now that I have shown you proof of how obesity and excessive weight harm more people and create a greater negative health impact than smoking and excessive alcohol consumption combined, let me ask you: "Do you have the same level of indignation for all three unhealthy habits?"

[Slide 35] Being overweight and/or obese has a number of causes. What I am focusing on here is the sin of overeating - what is commonly referred to as excess caloric intake.

[Slide 36] If more than seventy percent of Americans are overweight, with over half of these individuals qualifying as being obese, then do you agree that our culture lacks conviction about excessive caloric intake?

[Slide 37] Do you agree that our generation has drifted from a healthy lifestyle with regard to our diet?

[Slide 38] So here we are, most of us are over fifty and overweight. When we look at Scriptures that tout the virtues of living self-controlled lives, then look at ourselves in the mirror - many of us feel ashamed, frustrated or defeated. At those moments do you believe God doesn't like you? Let me reassure you, even on your worst day as a baptized disciple of Jesus,

[Slide 39] God looks at you with the same affection Cameron's parents view my grandson. God is not expecting perfection, but He is expecting conviction. Personally, I am not looking upon anyone here with an attitude of judgment, but I am looking for you to have an attitude of determination. To be determined to be different than the culture around you. To be determined to not let go of your convictions about what is right and what is wrong. And that together,

[Slide 40] All of us can "get a grip" on our conduct in an effort to do all that we can to promote *Generational Lift* rather than *Generational Drift*. To be certain and not ambiguous, in addition to over-eating there are many other subtle sins that demand our attention.

[Slides 41 & 42] Therefore, our homework assignment will be to choose one of the "respectable" sins on this list to focus working on a plan of repentance in our *Quiet Times* and *Discipleship Times* for the next six weeks. Then share your progress in our *D-groups* the next time we meet. As an aside, if your personal Bible study and discipleship times with others are not characterized by joy and encouragement, then something is off in your approach. Here is what I mean:

[Slide 43] If you are preaching the Gospel to yourselves in your personal Bible study times, then you should be filled with joy because the word gospel (transliteration in Greek: *euaggelion*; phonetic spelling: *yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on*) literally means good news.

[Slide 44] If you are always focusing on turning to God, then your discipleship times should be refreshing because that's how the Apostle Peter described repentance in [Acts 3:19](#).

[Slide 45] And remember where all this is headed toward - as depicted by what I call, "The Saint Peter's Pyramid of Faith." We are all working together in this *Empty Nester's* group to build upon our foundation of faith these Christ-like characteristics so that at the top of our Christian walk is a genuine love for God.

[Slide 46] If you're looking for a helpful character study in the Old Testament for poor self-control, then consider examining the life of Samson the Judge.

[Slide 47] If you're interested in an exemplary example of self-control in the Old Testament, then consider studying the life of Daniel the Prophet.

[Slide 48] In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul shared with the Corinthian disciples some core convictions that helped foster self-control in his own life.

Now Jean would like to share some convictions that are helping her deal with certain respectable sins in her own life.

As I consider my children and what may be ahead for them in the kingdom I am concerned. I have been a Christian for 34 years and I have seen several *drifts* and *lifts* as God prunes and builds his Church. And He is patient with us! Terrie Fontenot would tell me that my convictions set the bar for the body and for the future generations. So reach high. Don't settle for good enough.

Since God has given me everything I need for life and godliness it is a shame and hurtful that I would not take serious the character sins that continue to linger. Two such sins in my life are the sin of careless words and the sin of anxiety. These sins are wrapped up in the same package sometimes.

- Ecclesiastes 3 teaches "there is a time for everything." And verse seven highlights "a time to be silent, and a time to speak."
- Proverbs 12:18 warns that "the words of the reckless pierce like swords."

In Matthew 12:36-37 Jesus says I will be judged by every careless word spoken. Too many times and for too many years I had not trained myself to have self-control with my tongue when the emotions or fears were high. Sometimes its idle talk and, "Oops! I just shared something confidential." Or at least something that would hurt someone if they heard about it later secondhand. I would freely say whatever came to my mind at the time. Negative words that tear down gush would out and trust was broken. I convinced myself in the moment that I was justified to say what I did.

What I have learned is that I did not have a kind heart towards others. I look at Jesus and I stand convicted. He powerfully and consistently controlled his emotions and tongue, even under great pressure. He spoke only what the Father wanted him to say. And I have been given the same divine nature!

One thing that has tremendously helped me is to speak the truth and be vulnerable when I am scared. I used to get very upset with my husband's driving and fuss and say disrespectful things. Now I have learned to frankly share my fears and trust God will take care of the rest. And He has!

Humility and vulnerability is the key to my maturity. I need the input of others. It's great when your adult children can speak the truth to you too. Grandchildren are watching now. What will I teach them? I hope they will remember the kind, patient words of grandma, but even if I blow it, which I have, I want them to see me repent in humility. This is *Generational Lift*.

When it comes to anxiety I think the older I get the more insecure I can feel at different times particularly about the future or new situations. My fears become vocal but they also become attitudes in my heart. I get angry, I get frustrated and bothered that this is happening to me and I want to blame someone like Martha did with Jesus, "If you were here this would not have happened, or tell her to help me." I sounded just like she did when I was a young married woman: immature. I'm sure Jesus was saying, "Grow up Jean. Come over here and sit by me." I remember a time when I was ranting about how things just we're not coming together in a timely fashion for a dinner party.

Clay said to me "You need to stop. Go upstairs and pray." And I responded, "I don't have time to pray!"

For me, self-control means: *stop, pray and proceed with Jesus*. I'm so grateful for the wisdom I have received from Deb Anton, and friends. I don't always know what or why I may feel so strongly about certain things, so it helps me to journal. I look up scriptures to calm my anxious heart. Then I pray, and pray some more with friends. Also, it is the unexpected things that come up that affect me the most. "What, you mean I have to teach a lesson?" Or when I am asked to help resolve a difficult relationship problem that has arisen in the fellowship. I want to hide, or say no, or suggest someone else that's better at it.

So knowing that God has placed me in this position or time like this helps me realize who I am in his eyes and to surrender to his will, not mine. I know that when I live a life of fear that this is the same sin that entered the Pharisees hearts and lead them to reject Jesus. It's the same sin that divides relationships and keeps a church from growing. I want my maturity in this area to bring others security in the Lord, in the word of God and in the future of the church.

I also wish to share about one of my "sins of the tongue" - sarcasm. I used to consider poking fun at people as one of the cool things about being a "funny guy." That is, until I came across the following:

[Slide 49] *Sarkasmos*, the Greek transliteration of the word for sarcasm, literally means to strip off the flesh. This is where looking up the Greek definitions of words can help deepen our convictions.

Finally, I wish to remind you all to engage wisdom as you approach the topic of self-control, especially with regard to how you admonish one another. To go into our d-groups and rebuke your brother or sister for being fat is to entirely miss the teaching found in both passages I have quoted from 2 Peter 1 and Titus 2. Both apostles emphasize the foundation of grace. Therefore, being more self-controlled in one or more areas of my character does not mean I am more saved than my fellow disciple, but that these teachings and reproofs provide all of us unique opportunities to work on growing our maturity in Christ-likeness.

[Slide 50] Supplication from 1 Timothy 1:15-17.

[Slide 51] Discussion Questions:

1. How will the phrase "[Grace] teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions" affect your Bible study and fellowship?
2. What are some things you can do to encourage others in our *Empty Nester's Group* to be more determined to see "Christ formed in them?"