

**The Obvious Christian: Characteristics That Make A Christian Stand Out.**  
**Message 9 – The Self-Control of an Obvious Christian, April 20, 2008**  
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church

---

Have you ever noticed how often people do things and then say they just could not control themselves? They lose their temper with you and say, *"I just couldn't control myself."* They say bad things about you and then say, *"I just couldn't control myself."* They do something really stupid and say, *"I just couldn't control myself."* They commit a terrible sin and say, *"I just couldn't control myself."* And on and on it goes!

Probably most of us, have either heard something or even said something similar ourselves.

Self-control is certainly a characteristic that many are in need of today. A lack of control can touch every imaginable aspect of our life. It can be in an area that everyone else sees, but it can also be in an area that no one else knows about. One thing for sure, a lack of self-control will bring discouragement and trouble into a person's life. I personally know several people with tremendous potential, but every time they start to do well a lack of self-control derails their progress.

The question is, how can a person without self-control have self-control? For Christians the answer is simple. Let's open our Bibles once more to Galatians 5:22-23...

We exercise self-control as we walk in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a characteristic of those who are

identified with Jesus Christ and it enables us to Stand Out as Obvious Christians in our world.

I like a definition that is used in the Family Walk devotional series (June 1991, page 25), it says, *"Self-control is the ability to say no to what we shouldn't do and yes to what we should."*

Repeat

What are some things that we should say no to? Well, any temptation to sin as mentioned in verses 19-21: sex outside of marriage, looking at pornography, putting things before God, hating people, fighting with people, wanting what other people have, drinking, living for the party, etc. Those kinds of things!

As I mentioned back at the start of this series, these all continue to be areas people struggle with today. So, what would you say is the need of our time? Apparently, it is for self-control, the ability to say no to what we shouldn't do and yes to what we should.

Well, what are some of the things we should say yes to? At the very least, the things we've been talking about all through this series: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control; all the things that show forth our identification with Jesus Christ.

The value of self-control is well stated in Proverbs 25:28...

The New Living Translation has it this way, "A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls."

We don't fully appreciate the illustration being used here because none of us live in cities with walls around them. In earlier times most villages and towns were encircled by walls for protection. But we don't need to imagine what that was like we have a good illustration of it in the book of Nehemiah.

See Nehemiah 1: 1-3; 2:11-17...

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were vulnerable to attack from their enemies because the walls of the city were broken down. They had no way of defending themselves, and it left them in despair.

Proverbs 25:28 teaches that a person without self-control is just like that: vulnerable, open to attack, and in tremendous danger.

Without this wall of self-control, we leave ourselves open to the attacks of our enemies. Look with me at 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 2:16; Genesis 3:1-7...

Did you notice the enemies and dangers stated, outlined, and illustrated for us in those passages of Scripture? *Without self-control, Satan, the world, and sin are all ready to take over control of our lives!*

We look around us in our world today and we do not find very many good examples of self-control, so many lack it, but the Bible offers quite a few. Let me bring three to your attention.

There is the example of **Joseph** in Genesis 39:6-18...  
(Tell the story and use verses 8-9)

What kind of self-control did Joseph exercise in this passage? He kept saying no to the sexual advances of his master's wife.

What excuse might he have used to give in? He had a bucket full at his disposal! His brothers sold him. He is a slave. He is in a foreign land. God seemingly didn't care about him. What difference would it make? And we could go on and on with the possible excuses he could have used! When looking for excuses they are always readily available aren't they!

What was his reason for exercising self-control? He did not want to sin against God!

In order to use the defense of Joseph, what must be true of us? We need to have developed a relationship with God that matters to us. If our relationship with God means little to us, then sinning against Him will mean little as well. But if our relationship with God is important to us, then we will not want to sin against Him! Our relationship with God has to be more important than our own pleasure.

David also provides a good example for us, look at 2 Samuel 16:5-13...

What kind of self-control did David exercise in this passage? He said no to the option/temptation of having Shimei's head cut off.

What excuse might he have used to give in? He was the king and Shimei had no right to speak or treat him as he did.

What was his reason for exercising self-control? **Because God may have allowed it for a reason!**

In order to use the defense of David, what must be true of us? **Our relationship with God must be more important than our own feelings.**

**Daniel** is another good example, look at Daniel 1:8-16...

What kind of self-control did Daniel exercise? He refused to take of the food and wine of the king's table.

What excuse might he have used to give in? He was away from home. He was a captive in a foreign land. He had no right to refuse. He needed to eat something! In his present circumstances what difference would it make?

What was his reason for exercising self-control? **He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself before God.**

In order to use the defense of Daniel, what must be true of us? **Our relationship with God must be more important than our personal convenience!**

**The Apostle Paul provides two clear statements on self-control that are worthy of our attention:**

The first one is 1 Corinthians 9:24-27...

Here, Paul uses an athlete as an illustration of self-control. They

train hard; they exercise self-control so they can win a prize. I ran Cross-Country and Track while in high-school and all I have to show for it is a school jacket with 4 varsity letters on it. Which someone stole from me, so I don't even have that! If runners use self-control to simply win a race, Paul says that Christians should especially do so because we are looking for God's reward that lasts forever!

I go to garage sales and often find boxes of old trophies, and I think about all the work that went into winning them, and now they're just being discarded, for some reason they're no longer of any value. That will never be the case for the one who chooses to exercise self-control while being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's also look at 2 Timothy 2:3-10...

Paul uses three illustrations of self-control: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. In these illustrations self-control must be exercised to accomplish the goal of each. The soldier to please his commander, the athlete to win the race, and the farmer to reap a harvest; the Christian has a much higher goal, it is for the sake of others and eternity.

**As a result of this study, here are some things we know:**

- ✓ We know that a lack of self-control brings trouble into our lives. Patterns get formed early in life, so the sooner we establish a pattern of self-control the better.
- ✓ We know that self-control is for our good and that of

others whose lives we touch. At the very least it keeps us out of trouble and protects us from Satan, the World, and sin.

- ✓ We know that we are not strong enough to consistently exercise self-control. So we need someone stronger than ourselves to do so.
- ✓ And we know self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. So to enjoy it we must yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Now, although we know all these things, we often do not exercise self-control. **So, what can we do?**

Well, the answer will never change!

First, we must have Jesus as Savior. He won the victory over sin!

Second, we must yield our desires to God as a living sacrifice. What is more important: what we want, or what God wants?

Third, we must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit rather than our own. The Holy Spirit indwells us so this can be a reality.

All through this series of messages we have learned about what it means to be an Obvious Christian. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control; these are the characteristics of those who Stand Out in the World because of their identity with Christ.

As we bring this series of messages to a close, I'd like everyone

to close your eyes and bow your heads.

Can you say that the characteristics of an Obvious Christian characterize your life?

If so, Fantastic! Just remember to remain consistent: keep your eyes on Jesus and keep depending on the Holy Spirit for needed help.

But if you can not say they characterize your life, why?

(1) Is it because you have not received Christ as your Savior, then do so today.

Admit... Believe... Call...

(2) Is it because of sin in your life then confess that sin...

(3) Is it because you keep trying to but don't feel strong enough? Instead of depending on yourself, yield to the power of the Holy Spirit...

(4) Is it because right now you just don't want to live that way? Then let me leave you with a warning: none of us know what tomorrow will bring, so the Word of God says, *"Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."* Don't put off living for Jesus today, none of us have any idea what tomorrow brings.

If we are Christians, then let's live as Christians, being obvious in our faith that we might stand out in our world!