

BEING STEWARDS OF GOD'S MONEY

Principles & Practices: Principle Three

I will serve God, not money

SELF-CONTROL

What motivates me to discipline myself?

The key word in the second PRINCIPLE is “SELF-CONTROL.” Without self-control all the tools or practices of handling our finances will amount to little more than a pile of frustration. This PRINCIPLE flows out of the foundation of the truth that we are called to STEWARDSHIP, the first Principle. Because Jesus is King and since we have chosen to be His servants, we reflect these truths in the motivations behind the discipline of our lives.

The two sides of the coin that mints this PRINCIPLE is our choice to serve God, and our choice to not serve money. The question that probes our lives with the impact of these biblical insights is, “What motivates me to discipline myself?”

We must look into the Scriptures and see how this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, self-control, is to be received and developed in our lives. It seems that we must look back to what God has done for, look down to what the Devil is trying to do to us, look up in faith to what God wants to do for us right now, and look ahead with hope to what God has told us will happen in the future.

Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

There seems to be a slippery slope down toward serving money. The command in Exodus 20:17 says that we should not covet. It has been suggested that coveting slips into envy and favoritism, then manipulation, making false comparisons and even stealing. But the hard climb up to serving God is marked by steps like gratitude, delayed gratification, responsibility, and hard work.

How big a problem is coveting? And what are ways that we slip into it?

Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

What has appeared, training us to live self-controlled lives?

How does this passage link to the concept of the “X-changed life” (the three actions of putting off, putting on, and being transformed by the renewing of our minds found in Ephesians 4:22-24)?

Grace has taught us to say “no” to (or to put off) what? And to say “yes” to (or put on) what?

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 (ESV)

⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

In verse 8, other translations render it “let us be self-controlled.” What are we told to renew our minds with and to remind ourselves of, so that we can be sober and self-controlled?

This passage does not directly deal with finances. And yet the principle of self-control and thinking aright is critical if we are to experience God’s freedom in our finances. When do you tend to get disoriented, almost forgetting that you now belong to the day?

1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Developing self-control (being sober-minded) involves looking back to the work of grace God has done in our lives (the previous texts we have looked at). But it also means that we look “down” and see the danger of the Evil One seeking to devour us. When is it most obvious to you that the devil can use financial things to tempt you?

Note that the word rendered “sober-minded” in the ESV above is used figuratively in the NT, of being free from every form of mental and spiritual excess and confusion *be self-controlled, clear-headed, self-possessed.*

Galatians 5:22-25 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Often we make the mistake of going after the fruit rather than seeking to be filled with the Spirit. How is it helpful to remember that self-control is not just done “by yourSELF?”

2 Timothy 1:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Many people tend to excuse themselves from being self-disciplined (another way “self-control” in the text above is translated in other versions) because they think it is legalistic or “just not me.” How would this text address such a thought? How does this renewed mind help us change?

2 Peter 1:3-9 (ESV)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

The last “look” of developing self-control is to “look ahead.” We must renew our minds with the hope of a fruitful and productive knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Does the description of the qualities given above, including self-control, reflect more of a ladder or an escalator? Explain.

Verse 5 tells us to “make every effort.” But what is the reason behind this effort?

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We are to renew our minds by looking forward to and actively “waiting” for what?

How does grace train us?

1 Peter 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

How is the statement, “the end of all things is at hand,” act like smelling salts when we become disoriented by the things of this world?

Why do we need this perspective in order to pray?