

## NECESSITY OF SELF-CONTROL

**"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls." – Proverbs 25:28.**

IN OLDEN times cities were particularly places of refuge, where the inhabitants of the country congregated for protection. When the earth was less populous and the necessity for government was less appreciated than now, any marauding band was likely to take possession of whatever was open to their attack. So the cities of ancient times had strong walls. This was true, we remember, of Jerusalem and Jericho. It was true of ancient Troy, and also true of cities in Europe. In Vienna, the old wall of the city still stands; and so with other walled cities.

But as improved forms of government were adopted, cities no longer needed protecting walls. The police nowadays constitute a wall of protection. Our text is referring to a wall such as was formerly used, and to a city which had become dilapidated and the wall broken down. King Solomon gives this as a picture of a human being who has no rule over his own spirit. He is unable to protect himself against evil influences from within or without, as a result of having suffered his will to be broken down.

All mankind are born with more or less of determination. Some have this in a very marked degree; others in a lesser degree; no one, we believe, is wholly without this quality of will, purpose. But we find that whether our wills are strong or weak they need direction. Lessons in the directing of our wills come from various quarters; for instance, we have the laws of the city, laws of the state, laws of the country, which direct the individual as to what he may do and may not do – particularly what he may *not* do. As one looks into the source and history of these laws, he finds that they represent the accumulated will of a long period. Mankind now have very good

laws. We have often thought it strange that fallen men have been able to produce such just laws as we find on the statute books today.

But although very good laws may be made, yet people may ignore the law. A jury may set aside all law. A judge may pervert the law. Thus things that are unlawful may become a practise of an individual or a town or a city. To cultivate in one's self a lawless disposition is to cultivate the spirit of anarchy – a spirit of indifference to the rights and interests of others. There are some who manifest reasonable respect for the laws of man because necessity or public opinion makes it impossible or inadvisable to do otherwise, who may at heart be anarchists as regards the Law of God, the great Law-giver of the Universe.

### **SAD PERVERSION OF SOUND JUDGMENT**

To yield ourselves to passion, to allow it to sweep over us and master us, is disastrous, whether we are weak-minded or strong-minded. The weak-minded have their limitations; the strong-minded have the excess of power, and are more potent for evil. We hear a great many say, when they have lost control of their temper, or have been petulant or morose or ill-natured or discourteous, Well, that's *my way*; I do not mean any harm. They acknowledge the matter, and seek to justify themselves by saying that it is natural to them. But no human being should live according to what is *natural* to his or her fallen nature. A being created in the image of God, and still retaining some traces of his original Godlikeness, should live above the plane of the lower animals, which follow merely their natural instincts and passions. **[R5488 : page 195]**

Some seem to glory in what they are pleased to term their high spirit, which will always stand up for their "rights." *They* are not so weak and childish as to let anybody run over *them!* If they do not like what others do or say, they will tell just what they think of the others. *They* have some force of character! Oh, how the great Adversary and his hosts, together with the perverse fallen nature,

can deceive and mislead and blind the judgment that is not guided and instructed by the only true Guide – the Word of God! How they can make that which is noble, and truly strong and Godlike appear weak and puerile – and make that which is weak, base, selfish and animal appear strong and manly!

### **ALL NEED REGULATION BY SOME STANDARD**

All should recognize that the inclinations, the impulses and the preferences of the fallen nature of man are often contrary to that which is right, noble, truly desirable. All should be regulated by some *standard*, either the civil standard by which the world is governed, or the standard of God. But one might live up to the letter of a law and yet be violating its spirit. The Law of God is the very highest standard of law. And the spirit of God's Law is embodied in the Golden Rule. This standard the whole world recognizes as right; and surely the Lord's people should measure all their conduct and their words, yea, their very thoughts, by this standard. Thus they will be rulers over their own spirit.

The word *spirit* in the text under consideration represents [R5488 : page 196] the mind, the impulses of one's nature. We are to rule our mind, our natural impulses. This means that if a thought present itself to the mind, or if we feel a certain impulse, we should be quick to perceive the nature of the thought or impulse; and if it is not in harmony with the principles of righteousness or with our covenant as children of God, we should at once resist it. If we are unable to do this successfully of ourselves, as is often the case, the heart should be promptly lifted to the Lord for His promised grace to help in time of need. If we feel an impulse toward a certain action or course, we should carefully weigh the matter, and decide as to its righteousness or propriety in the circumstances, looking to our unfailing Source of help for guidance.

The world would say that this is too exacting – that they would have more pleasure in doing their own will. But we know that in

doing their own will they frequently get into difficulty. A Christian has covenanted not to follow his own will; he has given up his own will, and has taken the will of God instead. The more advanced the Christian, the more should we expect that he would be able to rule his spirit – "casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every *thought*" to the will of God in Christ. And if we rule our mind, our thoughts, we shall rule our tongue. If the thought were not in the mind, the tongue would not utter it.

There is a grave danger of saying things, or of doing things, under a momentary impulse, that our heart, our consecrated judgment, would not approve; hence the necessity of bringing our thoughts and impulses into subjection. We are to consider, What would be the effect of my words or my action upon another? Would it bring harm? Would it be an injury, or cause needless pain, for me to say or do this thing, or would it do good? By thus scrutinizing himself, by thus taking himself in hand, and ruling his spirit, the child of God is showing his earnest desire of heart to be pleasing to the Lord and true to his covenant. And those who learn to rule their own spirit according to the will of the Father are the ones whom He will be pleased to make joint-heirs with His Son in His Kingdom.

## **HOW TO ATTAIN STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

In what way can a Christian cultivate this control of his own spirit? At first the individual has not the power to control himself in everything; but as he learns to exercise self-control in the little things, more and more doing what he can in this direction, in thought and word and deed, he will gain in strength of character. We should remember the story of the man who wished to develop his muscles, and who for this reason began to practise each day in lifting a calf. He commenced when the calf was very young, and he lifted it day by day for weeks and months. In due time the calf had become an ox, and he was then able to lift the ox. His daily practise had

gradually strengthened his muscles; they increased in strength with the increase in the weight of the animal, until he was strong enough to lift the full-grown ox.

And so with the Christian in his character-development: If we daily practise self-control, we shall gradually attain a strong character along this line, which will be of inestimable advantage to us in our Christian warfare. The cultivation of self-control should *properly* begin in one before birth, yea, at the time of conception. The mother should practise self-control, that this disposition might be impressed upon the mind of her unborn child, that thus it might enter the world in a much more favorable condition in this direction. And this spirit of self-control will grow in the child after birth, under the proper training of the parent, so that the child, approaching manhood's estate, will be able to exercise more natural self-control. Such a one, if he become a child of God, will make a very noble Christian indeed; he will be strong in the Lord and be helpful to others. But all have not had this natural advantage, and must battle the more determinedly for this reason.

### **MORAL STRENGTH MORE DESIRABLE THAN PHYSICAL**

There is no place where the proof of our ability to rule our spirit is better shown than in our own home. With husband and wife, with parent and child, with brother and sister, this is an important matter. The battle with self is the greatest battle we have to fight; and the Word of God declares that "he that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." He is greater because he has learned to exercise the will, the determination, of a true character in the right direction, in the direction of control of self.

Moral strength is infinitely nobler and more to be desired than the greatest degree of physical strength or the keenest strategy. And it is only after we have conquered ourselves, only after we have become master of our own flesh, only after we have cast out the

beam from our own eyes, have subdued anger, malice, hatred and strife in our own hearts, that we are able, by means of these severe battles with our own weaknesses, to assist the brethren, to assist our neighbors, to aid them – by our example – in overcoming their besetments and infirmities.

## **WE MUST FIGHT TO THE END**

To rule one's own spirit, mind, disposition, implies a conflict similar in some respects to that of taking a city; for no matter where we begin, we find entrenched within us many armed and opposing powers. They have possession by *heredity* – they are there as the result of the fall. And if we have passed the days of youth they are the more strongly entrenched, and it requires the greater skill and generalship to rout them. But whether one has begun early or late, he that would succeed in ruling his own spirit must "war a good warfare." He must "fight the good fight of faith," down to the very end of the present existence.

If the child of God would be the victor in this fight, he must not only storm all the fortresses of inherited evils, which seem to be a part of his very nature, but having gained possession and taken his seat upon the throne of this symbolic city (his will), he must thereafter be continually on the defensive; for the old enemies are constantly on the alert, and ever and anon seek to regain possession, so that he who continues to rule his own spirit is one who has not only routed the enemy, Sin, from the throne of his being, but is continuing to keep him at bay.

This ruling of one's spirit is by no means an easy task; and, as in the illustration, it cannot be done single-handed and alone. Consequently, the wise "general" will invoke all the assistance at His command, remembering the words of the Apostle – "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places." (Ephesians 6:12.) These powers of the world, the

flesh and the Devil are closely allied, and therefore he who plans for conquest and an established reign thereafter, must seek alliance with another and a stronger Power. This Power is tendered to all who earnestly undertake this great work. It is none other than the Almighty Arm of our God, who says to those [R5488 : page 197] who accept His strength, greater is He that is with you – that is for you – than all they that be against you; gird yourselves like men, be strong, fear not. – See 1 John 4:4; Isaiah 35:4.

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