

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

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“If you have something to say.. keep your mouth shut!”

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We all probably had someone from our childhood who made a lasting impression with us, or whom we especially admired and wanted to please. I’m talking about someone outside the immediate family. Maybe a neighbor, a friend’s parent, a teacher, or grandparent. For me it was my high school baseball coach. Lyle Wilkerson, or “Coach” to his players, was a young man when he coached me. Today he is 87. I still talk to him two to three times a year. He seems to enjoy my phone calls, but I know I’m the one who is most gratified. Coach was a strict man, no nonsense and no excuses. He had a lot of sayings, but there is one that has stayed with me over the years. **“If you have something to say, say it with your glove, your arm or your bat, but keep your mouth shut!”** And he enforced that rule. We were taught to play ball, not mouth off, not question an umpire’s call, no trash-talk with the opponents. If you’re interested you can ask me about a tournament we played in Compton, California in summer of 1969. That discipline on the field resulted in us playing for the CA state championship in Connie Mack League (ages 16, 17, & 18). I was 18 that year.

Like all great coaches and teachers, Coach taught us life through the medium of his specialty, in this case baseball. I didn’t understand it at the time, all I was certain of was that I admired him and wanted to please him. As I became an adult and entered the workplace I came to realize that what I did was far more meaningful than what I said. James said it this way, though slightly out of context, “...Show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” James 2:18b. People are more impressed by what they see us doing than they are in

what we say about ourselves. We get that. We all agree that what we say is important and the value of careful speech should be high on our list of priorities. James also had plenty to say about how we talk, James 3:5-10. But I want to focus on what we do, because in my experience people listen more to that message than the spoken one.

It’s interesting that Jesus saw Nathaniel under the fig tree, and determined that he was a man without guile or deceit, John 1:47-51. As far as we know he had never spoken to Nathaniel before, but he must have seen him. I suppose it might have been miraculous on the part of Jesus to make that statement, but his miracles had a purpose

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for observers. There is no such purpose here. So I think he must have seen him before, watched his behavior, how he interacted with others. What Nathaniel said wasn’t what impressed Jesus, it was what he did. Like Nathaniel, what we do will be heard more clearly than what we say. It will tell others more about who we are than the words we speak.

There are two very similar qualities or characteristics that say a lot about who we are. Self-control and self-discipline. Both are more about what we do than what we say. They may seem interchangeable, but I see them as two very distinct things. My understanding is that self-control is more focused on the negative. Like trying to stop something; breaking a bad habit. Self-discipline is more focused on the positive. Like a commitment to something useful; exercise more or eat a healthier diet. Both are action-oriented. God’s word has a lot to say about them.

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Self-control is part of the Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:16ff. In Acts 15:29 the church leaders in Jerusalem, after hearing arguments from both sides, issued an edict about what constraints should be imposed on the gentile converts to Christ, “that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.” Self-control.

I’m sure you’ve noticed that main-stream media is fixated on the negative things people do. It’s more eye-catching and apparently more interesting or news worthy(?) to report the mistakes, faults and outcomes of bad decisions that people make than it is to report the upbeat and happy stuff. Similarly, just as Jesus was watching Nathaniel, people are watching Christians. Just like the media, people will notice our mistakes, faults and bad outcomes. However, when our focus is on breaking our bad habits then those things become less frequent. I have my own list of things to work on and that list changes as I age. You probably have yours, too. One of my exercises is to associate a bad habit with a scripture that addresses it. Memorize it or at least paraphrase it so that when I recognize the temptation or mistake I just made, I have a ready scripture to cite to myself. Proverbs 22:17-18 speaks about the value of having God’s word committed to memory. Here are a few common problems we all face and an associated verse that might help deal with it (an exercise self-control):

- **Temptations/sufferings in general:** 1Peter 1:3-7, Romans 5:1-5
- **Anger:** Proverbs 19:11
- **Staying spiritually focused:** Philippians 3:10-14
- **Impatience:** Proverbs 17:27-28

Let’s show the world who we are by what we do. ***If you have something to say...keep your mouth shut!***”

Self-discipline is similar but distinctly different (at least for me), and usually is a product of self-control. One of my favorite passages is Hebrews 12:11, “*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.*” There’s that fruit again. I realize the context is not about “self” discipline, but training ourselves to do things we know are good for us has good results. I’m sure

all of us have experienced that. Walking by the Spirit takes self-discipline and means that what we “do” should be to glorify God and not gratify ourselves.

My father wasn’t a religious man, but he taught us kids a lot of lessons that were rooted in the Bible. One was self-discipline. I learned early on to “think through” the projects I started because Dad wasn’t going to let me stop mid-way through it because it was too hard or I’d lost interest. He wouldn’t make me do it again, but he would make me complete what I started. That’s self-discipline. The elders regularly remind us to read our Bibles daily. That’s self-discipline. One way to break a bad habit is to replace it with a good one. Well, *dub!* Luke 11:24-26. These passages speak to good things we can do to replace the bad we’re trying to avoid (you probably have your own list):

- **When we have improper thoughts:** Philippians 4:8-9, 1Peter 1:13
- **When our faith seems weak:** 2Peter 1:3-9
- **When we feel like complaining:** Philippians 2:14-16

There are spiritual and secular things we all want for ourselves. Working to develop these two qualities or characteristics will help us achieve and enjoy them both. Jesus’ advice is to, “*Seek first His kingdom and righteousness...*”, Mt 6:33. God notices what we do and so do people. We can move closer to God, and serve and teach others without saying a word. Or in the words of Coach, “**If you have something to say...keep your mouth shut!**”