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The Source of Self-Control

Guest: Rob Bugh
From the series: Self-Control and Blended Families (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: Is self-control an issue for you? If it is, Pastor Rob Bugh says you’re not alone; and it’s not surprising.

Rob: You and I do not—we simply do not have the power to conjure up self-control on our own. Because of that, I am not going to give you five steps to greater self-control; I’m going to give you what the Bible gives you; and that is, Jesus Christ.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, October 4th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. How does knowing Jesus and having an understanding of the gospel help you cultivate self-control? What’s the relationship? We’re going to hear more about that today from Rob Bugh. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re listening this week to a message—we’ve heard Part One of the message already—Pastor Rob Bugh, who is a Pastor at Wheaton Bible Church in Wheaton, Illinois, talking at an event that FamilyLife® hosted, back in the spring of 2019. This is the Blended & Blessed® conference, and he was talking about priorities in a blended family and the need for there to be self-control. In fact, he used a passage that, Dave, I have to think this is one of those passages that you come back to regularly.

Dave: How did you know?

Ann: This is actually one of my favorite verses.

Bob: Is it really?

Ann: Yes.

Bob: I thought of it because it really takes a metaphor out of athletics—

Dave: Right.

Bob: —and applies it to our spiritual life.
Dave: It’s the first passage that, when I came to Christ in college, the young man that discipled me—took me to 1 Corinthians 9.

Bob: Really?

Dave: Yes; probably thinking the same thing: “You’re a college athlete; you probably don’t know the Bible actually uses an athletic metaphor about life.” I’ve never forgotten it.

Bob: Here it is—it’s from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 9—it says, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it,”—in other words, “Don’t just jog along, compete here,”—”Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath; but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

In this message that we are going to hear—Part Two—today from Rob Bugh, he took that passage, and the whole issue of self-control, and talked about how essential it is for us in any relationship—but in this case, in a blended family—to exercise self-control and keep our passions from over-ruling what matters most to us in a relationship.

We’re going to dive right in and listen. This is Part Two of Rob Bugh’s message from the Blended & Blessed event, back last spring.

[Recorded Message]

Rob: According to 1 Corinthians 9, self-control is overcoming your sinful passions. Self-control, according to these verses, is building some fences around your sinful heart. What does Paul tell us here, then, is the source of self-control?—it’s clarifying—it’s you getting a handle; it’s you thinking even, deeply, about: “What it is you desire,” “What it is you want,” “What it is that makes you tick,” because you are—now, hear me in this—“You are what you love. And what you love determines how you live your life.” We can thank Augustine for that.

That brings me to my third and final area. I want to ask this question: “What is the source of the source of this fruit of the Spirit? What is it that we need to prize that the Spirit will use to produce greater and greater self-control in our life?” The answer is found in the first verse we read—1 Corinthians 9 and verse 23: “I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.”

The gospel is Christ crucified in our place for our sins; so that the moment we believe, we find forgiveness for our sins, past, present and future. The moment we believe we are given the righteousness of Jesus Christ; so God sees us as perfect, and holy, and righteous in Jesus Christ. Then the moment we believe, we are adopted into God’s
complex family as adopted sons and daughters of the King of kings, and the Lord of lords—and that’s irrevocable; it’s irreversible; it’s eternal.

What Paul is saying in verse 23— this is the thing I want you to get above everything else I am saying: “The source of the source of self-control is the gospel. It’s rising Jesus above everything else. It’s seeing Jesus as, not merely useful, but beautiful. It’s seeing Jesus in His infinite glory, compassion, mercy and grace; as your bleeding and dying Savior, who hung on the cross in agony; endured agony to rescue you from yourself—from your sin/from your brokenness.” When that reality informs your mind and begins to melt your heart, the Holy Spirit will produce these fruit of the Spirit—all nine of them—including self-control.

Friends, you and I do not/we just simply do not have the power to conjure up self-control on our own. Because of that, I am not going to give you five steps to greater self-control. I’m going to give you what the Bible gives you; and that is, Jesus Christ.

Paul illustrates this in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where Paul says, “And we all, who with unveiled faces, contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.” Now, Paul is talking about Jesus. The Lord’s glory is a reference to Jesus, and Paul is saying we contemplate the glory that Jesus reveals about Himself in creation. Do you look around this spring and ask yourself the question: “What am I seeing about Jesus here? What are the metaphors of creation telling us/telling me about Jesus in this moment?”

We see the glory of Jesus in His Word. That’s why we memorize passages; we love certain sections of God’s Word because of what they tell us about Jesus. It’s looking for Jesus in your family, in your friends, your life situations, in the sermons you listen to, and the Bible studies you are involved in—you’re looking for Jesus: “We all who, with unveiled faces, contemplate the Lord’s glory, we are all being transformed into His image with ever increasing glory.”

What I want you to get out of 2 Corinthians 3:18 is Paul is telling us the key to transformation is contemplation. It’s not five steps; it’s not what you must do—it’s you looking away from yourself, and falling in love with the One who became a man for you—who suffered, [was] rejected, died for you, who was raised from the dead, who now rules as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Paul says the same thing six verses later—in Chapter 4, in verse 6, he says it a little differently when he says, “And He who said, ‘Let light shine in the darkness,’ made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.” The face of Jesus is a metaphor for the person and work of Jesus Christ.

It’s why Paul prays, in Ephesians, Chapter 3, “…that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith”— not money, not sex, not power, not family—“but Jesus would dwell in our hearts by faith, and we would be able to grasp, and wrestle with, and contemplate, and think
about how wide, and long, and high, and deep is His love—a love that surpasses knowledge—so that we can be filled through the gospel/through our relationship with Jesus to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

I want to ask you, brothers and sisters: “Is Jesus your Rachel? Is He really your Rachel? Is He what you prize more than anything else in life?”

Now, let me apply this to dating and marriage. In 1 Peter, Chapter 3, and verse 9, Peter says: “Do not repay evil with evil, insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing; because to this you were called in order to inherit a blessing.” I happen to think this is one of the most practical verses on dating/marriage relationships in the New Testament.

You see, let’s set it up this way—say your boyfriend or your spouse disappoints you, hurts you, offends you, sins against you, lets you down—in some way, rejects you. What Peter is telling us in this one verse is: “In the moment between that action and your reaction, there is a gap. What we normally do is fill that gap by striking back, so we repay evil for evil and insult for insult.

But if you are alive in the Spirit of the Living God, and you believe the spiritual life is not what you do but resting, and believing, and clinging to what Jesus has already done for you, then you will not look within, you will look away. You will fix your gaze on Jesus/fix your eyes on Jesus,”—Hebrews tells us. You know what will happen? You will repay evil with blessing, because you know that is exactly what Jesus Christ did for you; because the moment you come to Christ—Ephesians, Chapter 1—“You’ve been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

In John, Chapter 16, and verse 14, we have a verse that we often overlook relative to the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, where Jesus Himself tells us that the role of the Holy Spirit is to magnify Jesus in our hearts: “I am sending you the Spirit, who will glorify Me.” The role of the Holy Spirit in your life and in my life is to magnify Jesus in your heart. When Jesus is magnified in your heart, your marriage, your responses, your reactions, your relationship will be a thing of beauty.

“Is Jesus your Rachel? Do you contemplate Him? Think about Him? Wrestle with the wonder? Do you read? Do you organize your life around Him?” Obviously, you have other things to do, but is Jesus the center of your screen?—preeminent in your life? Is He beautiful, not merely useful?

Now, let me conclude with this: “Have you ever thought about why Jesus—I mean, really thought about—why Jesus left absolute infinite perfection, glory, perfect contentment in heaven among the Triune God? Have you ever thought about, ‘Why did He become a man?—why did He become a baby?—and suffer?—and allow Himself, The King of kings and Lord of lords, to be rejected, to be crucified, and to die that horrible death/that horrible agony on the cross, in our place, for our sins?’"
Well, yes, you’ve thought about it; but Hebrews, Chapter 12, and verse 2, gives us an insight; because there’s just a little phrase there/a clause, if you will, that tells us—speaking about Jesus—that: “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross,”—right? You know this verse: “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” You, as a believer in Jesus Christ, are Jesus Christ’s Rachel; you are His prize. No one/no one loves you like Jesus.

I wish for you, in the tension and the moments of life that are difficult, self-control; but the source of that prize is you cultivating this love relationship with Jesus, because you know, at the core of your being, you are completely, infinitely, permanently, totally loved—not unconditionally, because the condition was the death of Christ—but permanently. You are Jesus’ Rachel. I wish for you to know this!

When the Holy Spirit opens your eyes—and this has been the change in my life throughout the course of our almost 12 years of marriage—when the Spirit opens your eyes to see this, you won’t repay evil with evil; you’ll repay evil or insult with blessing; because you are living a gospel-centered, Jesus-centered, self-controlled life.

Let’s pray:
Father, we thank You for what You have done for us in Your Son. We marvel to think of how much You love us, to think of what Jesus did for us in light of who He is. We worship You; we exalt You; we praise You for our Savior. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

[Applause]

Ron: Rob, thank you.

Before you get away, a quick follow-up question: “What did it look like as your Rachel began to change from approval of your son—or those things—to ‘Wow; I’ve got to be Jesus-centered; I’ve got to put on self-control’? What did it look like for you then, as a dad, dealing with that issue between your son and your wife?”

Rob: Underneath the surface of all my horrible reactions and responses, and Rhonda bore the brunt of those, was this gradual change—that began with the death of my first wife, Carol—to understand that: “If God is sovereign, He’s completely and totally sovereign; and He has a difficult assignment for me,” and “The assignment is the death of my kids’ mother/the death of Carol, the best thing in my life at that time.”

I began this deep dive and read everything and was interacting with a lot of people. I began to see that, really, what was driving me at the core of my life was this notion that: “I’ve got to figure it out myself,” and “I’ve got to do this, and I’ve got to do that.” We call it moralism; it’s a Christian moralism, where I’m huffing and puffing. I began to see, “No, that entire focus is wrong.”
I began to read, and I began to memorize. You’ve heard some of the verses that I’d memorized that are central to me. I began to see that the New Testament teaches: “No, Rob; don’t dig in; look away.” As I began to do that, I saw my responses change. I had the ability to not repay evil for evil; or even if it was just something superficial—and man, I would want to respond; because I am always right—you know, I would just let it go. I would try to, by the power of the Spirit, repay it with a blessing. It was the gospel—it’s the beauty of Jesus, and living in light of that, that changed me, brother.

**Ron:** Thank you; thanks for being here with us. [Applause]

**[Studio]**

**Bob:** Again, we’ve been listening to Pastor Rob Bugh; and there, at the end, Ron Deal, who gave leadership to the *Blended & Blessed* event and who gives leadership to FamilyLife Blended®, which is a part of what we do, here at FamilyLife, to try to help blended and stepfamilies.

In fact, I should mention—coming up this fall, we’ve got an event taking place. This is not for blended couples specifically; this is for those who work with blended couples in church settings or in ministry settings to try to help strengthen those relationships.

At your church, do you have anything intentional or purposeful for blended families/blended couples?

**Dave:** Yes; we sure do. In fact, I don’t know what year it was; but I spoke at that Summit. You were there, Bob,—

**Bob:** I was there; that’s right.

**Dave:** —a few years back, sitting in a room with all these warriors, who were contending for the blended family was a privilege. We have them in our church, and we use all of Ron’s material—phenomenal helps for a very complicated situation.

**Bob:** When we were at that event together, you shared about an apology that you gave during a Sunday morning message; right?

**Dave:** Yes; that was the first time Ron and I talked. He found that on the internet and called me up, and said, “I can’t believe I’m hearing a pastor apologize to his congregation for making or feeling like”—I felt like blended families had maybe felt less-than in our church. I just said, “I’m sorry if we’ve ever made you feel that way; that is not the case at all.” Really, after that year, we started a ministry that really reached out to families that are blended.
Ann: I think that was important, because there can be a sense of shame and even a stigma that goes along with couples that are blended or have gone through a divorce. Ron has such great material that can bring them in; but I think some people are afraid or ashamed to even come, so I think to bring this out into the open and Dave’s apology really meant a lot at our church.

Bob: I would hope that every church would think, “We don’t want blended families in our church to feel less-than.”

Dave: Right.

Ann: Exactly.

Bob: If you think that’s what you’ve been communicating, let me encourage you—whether you’re a pastor, a lay leader, on a church staff—either attend or send someone from your church to attend the Summit on Stepfamily Ministry. This is taking place October 24th and 25th in Chesapeake, Virginia.

There is information about the Summit on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com. Ron Deal will be giving leadership to this event. Darryl and Gwen Smith will be speaking; Michelle Cushatt is going to be there; Pastor Ben Young from 2nd Baptist, in Houston; many more speakers and leaders as we address the theme, “Stepfamilies in Crisis,”—talking about the major issues that cause couples and families to go into crisis mode and what the church can do to help families in the midst of those kinds of crises.

Again, find out more about the 2019 Summit on Stepfamily Ministry when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com; or if you have any questions, give us a call at 1-800-FL-TODAY—that’s 1-800-“F” as in Family, “L” as in Life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Speaking of events, we’ve got a great event happening this weekend in Naples, Florida. It’s a Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway that’s taking place today, and tomorrow, and Sunday. Hundreds of couples are going to be joining us for this weekend getaway. We hope you’ll pray for them as they take some time to build into their marriage.

If you’ve never been to a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway, we’d like to send you a gift card so that you and your spouse can go. We’re making that gift card available this week, along with a copy of the book, (A) Typical Woman, that we talked about earlier this week with Abigail Dodds. The book and gift card are our gift to you when you become a FamilyLife Legacy Partner—this is somebody who, each month, makes a contribution to support the ministry of FamilyLife. The Legacy Partner team is the critical team that provides the funding for production and distribution of this program, the operation of our website—all that we do, here, at FamilyLife—you help make it possible as a monthly Legacy Partner.
Again, when you become a Legacy Partner today, we’ll send you a copy of Abigail Dodds book, (A) Typical Woman, and a gift card so that you and your spouse can attend an upcoming Weekend to Remember getaway. Find out more, or sign up online at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to sign up. Our number is 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

With that, we’ve got to wrap things for this week. I hope you have a great weekend; hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend—we think that’s important. And we hope you’ll join us on Monday when Shaunti Feldhan’s going to be here with Brian Goins to talk about why husbands are sometimes a little prickly, a little touchy, a little on edge, and “What should a wife do when that happens?” Hope you can tune in for that conversation on Monday.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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