

## Self-control

So we are encouraged to add to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge *self-control*. Paul mentions *self-control* as one of the fruits of the Spirit; in other words, it is not a fruit of our own efforts, our own will-power, our own work, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It can only happen as we hold ourselves near Jesus, looking to Jesus. Self-control means “controlling the passions instead of being controlled by them” (Michael Green). It means living in real life, in real time the reality of what God has already accomplished for us in Jesus Christ. What is this reality? We who believe have *escape[d] the corruption in the world caused by evil desires* (2 Pet 1:4). What sorts of evil desires?

Anne Widdecombe, Shadow Home Secretary in the British House of Commons once said these words: “Let's face it, we are not a happier society as a result of” the freedoms we now have. “We have record rates of divorce, record rates of suicide, record rates of teenage pregnancy, record rates of youth crime, record rates of underage sex. We should invite people to recognize that the Great Experiment has failed. You cannot have happiness without restraint” (Alan Wilson, from Electronic Telegraph). Jesus is the only one who can help us escape this kind of damage in our relationships.

Jane Urquhart in one of her novels tells how one of her characters, Emily, was given the opportunity to go back to her home life growing up. Arianna was wishing to go back into her own childhood and do the same.

Emily: “... believe me you wouldn't want to. There's dirt everywhere. Nothing is pure.”

Arianna: “What else did you see?”

“Glances.”

“Glances?”

“Yes, the way my sisters looked at each other, secretly and with envy, blood lust, even hatred.”

“But they were just children.”

“So was I. And I was the most pulled in, the worst of the secret haters. It was very plain. I never looked anyone in the eye, but I scrutinized them, investigated them, when they weren't looking at me, and with ruthless coldness. And I thought that I loved my family. In fact, I thought they were all that I loved. Looking at my dirty little faces and suspicious darting eyes I realized it was only my own imagination and my brother Branwell that I loved. And how jealous I was of my imagination: that tiny,

detailed horrifying world I carried with me everywhere I went. My treasured, invented nightmare, my darling pain. It locked me carefully away from other people; even the other people that I believed I was close to. But it opened me up too, and set me loose in places no one could have believed I would ever be able to visit” (Jane Urquhart, Changing Heaven).

Know what God's plan is for the family – and by this I also mean the church family? His plan is train us to be self-controlled people who learn, as the Spirit enables us, not to give those glances of hatred we secretly hide from one another. His plan is to teach us to speak to one another, not with hatred in our hearts, but with a desire for ourselves first to be human as God meant us to be – and only then, speak to one another in love, helping each other to have this kind of humanness become reality. It is to learn that we have become participants of the divine nature, that Christ Jesus himself is in us, so we can draw on his life inside of us now to become better human beings.