

[R5652 + R4789]

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CONTROL

### A CITY WITHOUT WALLS

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

*Pro 25:28 TPT If you live without restraint and are unable to control your temper, you're as helpless as a city with broken-down defenses, open to attack.*

FORCEFUL, indeed, is the simile found in our text. A city, especially in olden times, was a place where people were congregated for mutual advantage and protection. Marauders were abroad ready to plunder and the wall of the city was very much in the nature of a preservation from harm, that the inhabitants might be able to protect their valuables, their rights, their interests.

Any city with broken-down walls would have great reason to fear such marauders. It would invite attack and be certain to meet with disaster some time.

For a like purpose God, in creating man, gave him a *will*. It is one of the strong elements of man's likeness to his Creator. We may have a will, however weak our bodies, or, however strong our passions. That will may be strong whether we are brought into outward subjection to others or not. **Our bodies may be enslaved, but our wills cannot be enslaved without our permission. Our will is something which cannot be taken from us; but it needs to be defended; it needs to be repaired; it needs to be made strong in weak places.**

*(John Gill: He that hath no rule over his own spirit,.... His affections and passions, puts no restraint, unto them, as the word signifies; no guard against them, no fence about them, to curb his curiosity, to check his pride and vanity, to restrain his wrath and anger and revenge, and keep within due bounds his ambition and itch of vainglory;*

*is like a city that broken down and without walls; into which the may go with pleasure, and which is exposed to the rapine and violence of everyone; and so a man that has no command of himself and passions, but gives the reins to them, is exposed to the enemy of souls, Satan and is liable to every sin, snare and temptation.)*

The man has here likened such a city to a broken down human will. **The will is to be continually on guard over the mind and to allow nothing to enter there except through the regular gates—Conscience and Judgment. These gates are to be watched so closely that they may admit only such thoughts as would be non-injurious, profitable, wise—in harmony with the Word of God. Every human being should have a will and should keep it in good repair, should see to it that it does not get broken down; otherwise shipwreck of character will follow**

## THE NECESSITY FOR STRENGTHENING THE WILL

Those who do not attend to this and do not strengthen the will where they find special liability to assaults, are sure to have it much broken down so that, by and by, they reach a place where they have no will, no self-control. Just as in a devastated city the protecting walls have been destroyed and the enemy finds easy access, **so the human being who yields to sin and various weaknesses and assaults of the Adversary has lost his real manhood and is in danger of losing everything.**

It is a part of our duty as Christians and as New Creatures to withstand all assaults of the Adversary; and these assaults come, not from visible forces alone, but from evil spirits; from those who seek to obtain possession of us—as is the case with those who come under the control of these evil spirits. Their wills are subdued, broken down, and they are in the hands of their enemies, exactly as pictured in our text. Let such strive to cast out the enemy, to resist him, to strengthen the walls of their minds and to make an alliance at once with the Lord Jesus. Let them give their hearts fully and completely to him and accept his will, his Word, his guidance, in every matter.

True, when thus released from the bondage of sin and of Satan, they become bond-slaves of righteousness and of Christ; but when it is realized that to be the bond-servants of Christ means to serve that which is good and true and right, and to be in harmony with the Father, **all should rejoice to place themselves fully and unreservedly under the control of him who hath so loved the entire race of mankind as to purchase them with his own precious blood. Surely all are safe in his hands!**

But it is not sufficient that any of us merely place ourselves in the hands of the Lord. The Psalmist counsels us, "Commit thy *way* unto the Lord; *trust also in him*, and he shall bring to pass; and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light." (***Psa. 37:5.***) The Apostle Paul tells us that "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (***Phil. 2:13.***) He works by means of the promises in His Word; by means of the various experiences of life, its disciplines and humbling processes, **and it is well that we take heed to each lesson as it comes if we desire to have a character developed in the likeness of our Head.**

By the *will* is not meant merely a *wish*. There is a decided difference between a wish and a will. Some wish that they possessed a million dollars, but they have not the will even to try to get

it. Some have a wish to get up at a certain hour in the morning; but the *wish* does not get them up, because the *will* is broken down. They say to themselves, "Oh, a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands in sleep!" (**Proverbs 6:10; 24:33**) They have no control of themselves. They may think they will gain this control by setting an alarm clock. By and by the alarm clock does no good; they do not hear it at all.

Whoever allows his will to become broken down as to the time he will arise in the morning has a more or less weak will in all matters. We should make reasonable regulations for our time of rising and of retiring. **Having used our best judgment as to what should be done, we should see that it is done.** Unless the doing of this should be found harmful to ourselves or to someone else, it should be carried out.

It is important to carry out the dictates of our best judgment so that the will may be strong, so that the individual may not be a vacillating character.

Indecision and lack of character in little things affect all the greater things in life. The person who gets up irregularly is apt to be irregular in business. The person who cannot determine what he should eat is likely to be subject to caprice, to be weak in all his decisions. Such a one will be likely to let some salesman influence him as to what he will buy. Some are too largely subject to the control of others.

*(MacLaren: Here we are in a state of warfare which calls for constant shutting out of enemies. Temptations are everywhere; our foes compass us like bees; evils of many sorts seduce. We can picture to ourselves some little garrison holding a lonely outpost against lurking savages ready to attack if ever the defenders slacken their vigilance for a moment. And that is the truer picture of human nature as it is than the one by which most men are deluded. Life is not a playground, but an arena of grim, earnest fighting. No man does right in his sleep; no man does right without a struggle.)*

### **"HE THAT RULETH HIS OWN SPIRIT IS GREATER THAN HE THAT TAKETH A CITY"**

We are not to lose sight of the fact that we are to be "workers together with God" in the accomplishment of the great transforming work to be wrought in us by the renewing of our minds. Our battle with *self* is our greatest battle, and we have the Lord's Word for it that he that "ruleth his own spirit [his own mind, will] is better than he that taketh a city," because he has to that extent learned to exercise the combativeness of a true character in the right direction—that of self-control.

But, lest we become discouraged with the slowness of our progress, we should ever remember that the attainment of the control of our own spirits, our own minds, the bringing of these into full accord, full harmony, with the Lord and, so far as possible, into accord with all of the Lord's people who are in accord with him, is attained "*finally*," as the Apostle informs us; it is gradually

reached by "patient continuance in well doing," relying upon the Divine assurance of grace to help in every time of need.

Let us all strain every energy toward this final and grand development. **We are to have it continually before us as the standard, the ideal, the aim, and although we may fail time after time, if we are rightly exercised in the matter we shall be stronger as the result of each failure; for each failure will show us, more clearly than we previously discerned, the weak points of our characters,** naturally resulting from the fall. And if each weak point be carefully noted and guarded against as respects the future, we shall come, by and by, by the grace of God and under the direction of our great Teacher, by his Word and example and providential leadings, to that subdued condition, that harmonized condition, which will fully accord with the will of God.

**To such, looking back, even the failures which, subsequently recognized, led to greater fortification against the wiles of the Adversary and the weaknesses of the flesh, may be seen to have been overruled by the Lord for our blessing, according to his promise that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God."—Rom. 8:28.**

**God is seeking for the class of people who *properly* rule their own minds.** If they learn to rule their minds before they come into the family of God, it will be that much the better for them. But at any rate, the only way they can get into the Kingdom will be by developing character.

The Bible tells us particularly what things are of the flesh, and what are of the Holy Spirit, the holy mind, of God; what things, therefore, constitute the holy disposition we should have. It tells us that we should put away anger, malice, hatred, bitterness, wrath, anger, strife; and that we should put on meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. These lessons must be learned. We cannot say that the *flesh* will ever be brought under complete control; but the *will* must be there, and as much control of the flesh as is possible by Divine help should be added day by day.

The Lord is seeking people of strong will, strong character. Therefore there must be a positive turning to the Lord and a definite covenant with Him at the first, or else we are not acceptable to the Father. Then after we come into His family we find that some things that we thought all *right* are all *wrong* and must be corrected; and in proportion as we have in our past life ruled our own minds, controlled our fleshly appetites and impulses, in that proportion we shall make slow or rapid progress in the new way. How much of consecrated time may we use for business, for pleasure, or in one way or another? How much of consecrated money shall we spend on ourselves? All this is to be regulated by our Covenant with God. We must seek first the interests of the Lord and His Kingdom. These must be first in all our arrangements, and earthly things must be secondary. Hence the importance of fixed character, a will prompt and unflinching for God.

**Pro 16:32** *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*