

## **What does SELF-CONTROL mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?**

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the signs and actions that the Holy Spirit is alive within us and helping us live by faith in our daily lives.

“What does SELF-CONTROL mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?”

This was the focus of the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the 2022 BELIEVES season held on Tuesday, March 8, 2022, with reflections shared by Chuck Bengochea, former President and CEO of both HoneyBaked Ham and Family Christian.



“My call is to advance the kingdom of God in the workplace,” Bengochea opened by saying. “I have had the privilege of pouring through the Word on self-control the last three months. To me self-control is the ability to delay gratification and do the right thing even when we don’t want to.”

Bengochea also said self-control gives us freedom.

“Read through studies, and you’ll see the outcomes of self-control are better relationships; higher incomes; and reduced depression, anxiety, and substance abuse,” he said. “If you could bottle self-control — Wow!”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bengochea said self-control is foundational to living out our Christian walk.

“Serve, love, be kind, generosity – all depend on self-control.”

Yet, self-control is a struggle.

Bengochea shared, “All things are idols. Why do I struggle if I know the outcome is good?”

The reason, according to Bengochea, is mentioned in Scripture.

“The heart is deceitful in all things,” he stated. “Our first parents (Adam & Eve) were deceived.”

One of Bengochea’s favorite chapters in the Bible is Romans 7, which displays some of Paul’s wrestlings and provides some of his words to articulate the reason for the struggle.

Drawing from Paul’s words, Bengochea added, “We’re slaves to sin. We try to master self-control in our power.”

In his own life, Bengochea related to everyone how he has wrestled with self-control as a part of his experience doing triathlons.

“I’ll finish a triathlon, and then within a week, I’m shooting for another time. It’s a lot easier to envision changing than to actually change. Our will power muscle is puny, and it fatigues easy.”

So, what can we do about it?

Bengochea believes author Stephen Covey hit on it when he wrote “you have to gain clarity on your deeper ‘Yes.’”

“Then, what is the deeper purpose?” Bengochea asked everyone present. “It’s to fall madly in love with Jesus Christ.”

He went on to comment that the church often gets it wrong.

“We’re encouraged to give and serve, but none of these are the primary driver. It should be to fall deeper in love with Christ.”

Bengochea drew a distinction for everyone explaining that “knowing of Him” is religion and trying to “please Him.” In contrast, “knowing Him” is when he believes we’ll find the fruits of the Spirit.

“It’s vertical, not horizontal.”

Perhaps, from the reflection on “knowing Him” and the safety and peace that comes from the Spirit, Bengochea opened the conversation up more personally.

“I found out three weeks ago I have cancer,” Bengochea revealed. “Tomorrow, I learn how far it’s spread.”

The moment was moving, and many present felt the weight of the emotions present.

After a bit of a pause, Bengochea continued his remarks centered on Christ, His love, and His power. He did this by telling about his hero.

“I am a Cuban refugee, born in Havana,” he said. “I didn’t know my dad, and my mom didn’t speak English. She was an attorney in Cuba – my hero. She raised me and my brother. I didn’t do dope in the 70s and 80s because I was constrained by the love of my mom.”

But then he drew a comparison, sharing, “How much more powerful would it be if I was constrained by the love of Christ?”

A self-proclaimed South Florida jock who earned his degree from Cornell after high school, Bengochea told everyone that when he went to work at Coca-Cola, it was great.

At Coke, he said, “I’d simply outwork you.”

Underneath it all, Bengochea said there was not a moment of that phase of his career where he felt he belonged until God healed him.

“I was religious. My wife and I were a part of the Marriage Encounter movement, fostered kids, and did other things to serve, but I was anxious.”

He said he found himself wondering, “This can’t be what a relationship with Jesus is.”

Now, after falling in love with Jesus for decades, Bengochea explained how things have evolved.

“I’ve been married for 47 years. I don’t need a list to love my wife – it’s in my heart. Love always wants what’s best for the other person – always.”

So, in the end, after wondering, “this can’t be what a relationship with Jesus is,” he said, “I decided I’d do everything to fall in love with Christ. God wants our heart. My reason had been to elevate Chuck.”

As a father, Bengochea later drew from this to tell his kids, “I’d rather you not serve until you fall in love with Christ.”

In all this, Bengochea pointed out there is a paradox.

“The paradox of self-control is that it’s not about control, it’s about surrender,” he revealed. “You do it because you love our Heavenly Father. As we fall in love, we find out He’s trustworthy. If He’s always trustworthy, then we surrender, and it goes on. It’s a cycle.”

He then pointed out a distinction around another often-mentioned phrase related to surrender and self-control – to let it go.

“It is so much easier to ‘let it go,’ but our role is obedience. We don’t worry about outcomes or where it goes. We serve. He will take my life where He wants to take it. It’s not just that I want to accept God’s will – it’s what’s best. That’s where I am at today.”

So how do we get to falling head over heels in love with Jesus Christ?

“For me, there is a quote I think of,” Bengochea stated. “Habits eat will power for breakfast.”

Further breaking down the focus on habits, Bengochea revealed that statistically the three ways that matter most are to be in His Word every day, being in prayer, and being in community.

According to Bengochea, being in His Word every day is the “single greatest vehicle to spiritual maturity.”

As for prayer, Bengochea mentioned that statistics indicate 95% of all Christians say they’re not satisfied with their prayer life. For he and his wife, being intentional about prayer is a game changer.

“Each year my wife and I pick a scripture verse to pray for each of our kids and grandkids,” said Bengochea. “Then each day, my wife and I have our own quiet time, but in the afternoon, we come back together and pray together sitting on our deck. It’s the most intimate thing she and I do. She gets to hear my heart and vice versa.”

Lastly, on community, Bengochea said that relates to church attendance.

No matter which of the habits the focus is on, he added, “60 days, not 30, make a habit.”

Bengochea remarked that one of the challenges he has when it comes to falling in love with Christ – a challenge he feels we have across the board – is that we walk horizontally and look at outcomes.

“The only goal God has is to change us into the image of the Son – to be refined. If a house helps, great; if not, great. When we’re refined, there’s more joy there.”

What would victory look like in all this?

“A deeper walk with the Lord,” he answered. “We’d be bulletproof. No lying, cheating, or stealing, and (in the professional context), if a job is lost as a result – OK, no big deal.”

Overall, he said we’d go to the marketplace with courage, and walk it out with grace and Truth, and with humility.

“Truth without grace is legalism. Grace without Truth is anarchy.”

Then thinking more about having a deeper walk with the Lord, he added, “If you haven’t been looked at as strange, you probably haven’t been walking it out. We need to be a sweet aroma.”

Before closing, Bengochea shared one more anecdote from his time leading in the corporate world.

“When I was leaving HoneyBaked Ham, there was a VP that ran our franchise business, who I had worked with for 18 years,” he recalled. “At the going-away celebration they held for me, the VP, who had been in a homosexual marriage, said, ‘Everyone here knows Chuck and I have a different world view, but for 18 years Chuck has loved me.’”

After sharing this, Bengochea reflected and told the BELIEVES audience, “It’s not my job to convict you of your sin – that’s the Holy Spirit. My job is to love you and point out things in Truth.”