Ruling your Spirit

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

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."
II Corinthians 4:8-10

Introduction:

1. In light of our sanctification and call to holiness, which we studied this morning, let us rule our spirits.
2. Many sins are the result of not ruling one's spirit; many destroyed lives are from not ruling one's spirit.
3. And it is impossible to have the fruit-bearing life of a victorious saint without learning to rule your spirit.
4. Consider our first text above, which highly commends ruling the spirit. But also consider Proverbs 25:28.
5. Natural maturity is ruling your spirit; spiritual maturity is ruling your spirit in a godly way of righteousness.

I. What is your Spirit?

A. Your spirit is the internal apparatus of choice, feelings, temperament, affections, and so forth.
B. It is the internal you, of which only the ruled part should ever be seen in the outside world.
C. We say of persons and animals, "He/she is very spirited," meaning of an intense inner power; we also say, "She has such a sweet spirit," and we are describing her inner beauty that shows.
D. If we try to divide and dissect the spirit, soul, heart, and mind too much, two things happen.
   1. We lose sight of the lesson contained in the verse in foggy mists of human speculation and metaphysical concepts about the possible slight variations in these similar terms.
   2. We presume on the wisdom and power of the Word, Who alone divides such (Heb 4:12).
   3. If I say, "You picked up my spirit," or "You blessed my soul," or "You warmed my heart," do you know easily what I am saying by all three? Or do you see deep divisions?
E. The spirit of a depraved child of Adam chooses, feels, loves, and so forth according to sin.
F. The spirit of a child of God can choose, feel, love, and so forth according to holiness.
G. Yet there are temperamental traits in each person that are part of their spirit, both before they are born again and after they are born again. For example, the aggressive are still aggressive!
H. Obviously ruling our spirit is a choice, so we cannot hide behind "that's just the way I am."

II. What can your Spirit Do?

A. Your spirit can sustain you through overwhelming infirmities, which is a blessing (Pr 18:14).
B. It can bleed your soul with unbearable pain from the inside out, which is a curse (Pr 18:14).
C. This strength of spirit is not mere toughness, but the grace of God made perfect in weakness.
D. Your spirit can make you think negatively and turn all your days to horrible days (Pr 15:15).
E. It can be happy regardless of circumstances and turn every day into a feast (Pr 15:15-17).
F. This optimism is not sanguine folly, but a spiritual perspective of godliness and contentment
G. Anger against a brother without a cause is murder, but an angry spirit can do it (Matt 5:22).
H. Your spirit can ruin a marriage, if you do not rule it by the covenant of God (Mal 2:15-16).
I. There are people who can think themselves into the absolute black pit of despair … in hours!
J. There are people who can hold bitterness forever – they are bitter. Forgive! Forget! Now!
K. Some make foolish decisions boldly and impetuously by a hasty spirit that is sin (Pro 14:29)!
L. Others are known as being very trustworthy for their faithful spirit in conduct (Prov 11:13).
M. A woman can have a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price to God (I Peter 3:3-4).

III. What is Ruling your Spirit?

A. It is controlling the impulses of your spirit to where you do not allow it to cause you to sin.
B. There is natural rule of your spirit, but we are talking about spiritual rule to the glory of God.
C. You are capable of departing from the living God without daily exhortation (Heb 3:12-13).
D. Moses did not rule his spirit perfectly; one burst of anger led to disobedience (Num 20:1-13).
E. Elijah lost sight of his great God after Carmel, when hearing Jezebel's threats (I Kgs 19:1-4).
F. Ahab did not rule his spirit, when he was disappointed by Naboth's answer (I Kings 21:1-4).
G. Job ruled his spirit … for a while (1:20-22), but then became melancholy (3:1); he should have hoped in God as did David (Ps 42,43), and his friends should have comforted him. But with poor friends and self-pitying defense tactics, he spiraled down until Elihu intervened.
H. Paul learned to trust the grace of God and seek God's glory over his own comfort and peace.
    1. When he had a thorn he despised, he chose to glory in it by Scripture (II Cor 12:7-10).
    2. James has written to us to love trials more clearly than God spoke to Paul (James 1:2-4).
I. Paul described ministerial lives of the apostles and elders with good instruction (II Cor 4:8-9).
    1. They were troubled on every side – but they were not distressed, which is being vulnerable to the overpowering pressure of some adverse force!
    2. They were perplexed, facing doubts and difficulties about important matters – but they did not despair, lose their faith and become hopeless!
    3. They were persecuted horribly and often – but they never thought they had been forsaken!
    4. They were cast down, discouraged or depressed – but they were not destroyed, quitters or dysfunctional in fulfilling their responsibilities!

IV. How can you Rule your Spirit?

A. There are no easy and cute answers, as there are none for corruptible crowns (I Cor 9:24-27).
    1. Ruling your spirit is like ruling your appetite, there are no simple rules; there is discipline.
    2. Do you think that athletes love pain, self-denial, torturous repetition, and no pleasure?
    3. They are motivated to these high levels of discipline by an earthy reward, we a heavenly.
    4. Our rewards are two-fold – our holy God is pleased ***and*** we can have successful lives!
    5. Consider! Ruling our spirits pleases our Holy Father ***and*** life can be a continual feast!
    6. We have wonderful promises to motivate perfecting holiness in our spirits (II Cor 7:1).
    7. It is daily discipline of athletes or soldiers to put on the Lord Jesus (Rom 13:14; Ep 4:24).
B. No two spirits are exactly alike, for men have different tendencies of reaction to life's events.
    1. If you have an angry spirit, you must learn to slow down getting mad (James 1:19-20).
    2. If you have a verbal spirit, you must learn slower speaking and faster hearing (Jas 1:19).
    3. If you have a foolish spirit, you must learn and work at being more sober (Eph 5:3-5).
    4. If you have a melancholy spirit, you must learn to stop thinking and stay around others.
    5. If you have a critical spirit, you must learn to compliment, praise, and commend others.
    6. If you have a fearful spirit, you must take the initiative to speak and confront others.
C. Being forewarned is to be forearmed. At the instant your spirit turns, you must turn it back.
D. Start at home, for we relax the most with the dearest. Most everyone is "ruled" in public!
E. You are not going to do anything of spiritual value without the Lord, so pray (James 5:13).
F. It is putting on the new man, which has righteousness and holiness for your spirit (Eph 4:24).
G. Your outward man may be exhausted and troubled; God can renew the inner (II Cor 4:16).
H. You know the situations that tempt you like the food that tempts you, so get yourself ready.
I. You should avoid situations that tempt you – stay far from them (Matt 5:29-30; Rom 13:14).
J. You need the regular daily exercises of godliness in prayer, confession, reading, singing, etc.
K. You need godly companions and their company (I Sam 23:16; Psalm 119:63; Prov 13:20).
L. Assemblies are not for the pastor to have an audience, but for your perfection (Heb 10:23-25).

M. We need to relish the opportunity of comforting the feebleminded (I Thess 5:14; Isaiah 50:4).
N. If a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, and joy is a commandment, what hinders you?
O. You remember God's goodness by faith and wait for Him (Psalm 42:5,11; 43:5; I Sam 30:6).

Conclusion:

1. Your spirit is you; and you are called to rule it. Your holiness before God and men depends upon it.
2. Your spirit is you; and you are called to rule it. Ruling it is maturity; not ruling it will bring destruction.
3. If you do not rule your spirit, you are a loser. If you rule your spirit, you are a mighty man of valor. Amen!

For further study:

1. "Proverbs 18:14": http://www.letgodbetrue.com/Proverbs/18_14.pdf
2. "Proverbs 17:22": http://www.letgodbetrue.com/Proverbs/17_22.pdf