

9 Self-Control: The Fruit of Discipline

On the night of October 8, 1871, a woman named Mrs. O'Leary lighted a small lamp and carried it to her barn so that she could see to milk her cow. The cow kicked over the lantern, and flames from its burning wick spread quickly throughout the barn as strong winds fanned them. The fire raged for more than 24 hours, wiping out the central business district of the great city of Chicago, and destroying 17,450 buildings in an area covering three and one-half square miles. At least 300 people were killed, 90,000 were left homeless, and 200 million dollars' worth of property was destroyed.

Fire is necessary and has many uses in our homes and factories when it is kept under control. But when it goes out of control it becomes a terrible, destructive enemy. Proper control is essential in our use of fire as a great source of energy.

Humans were created full of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual energy, which must be properly used and controlled in order to be beneficial. It is no wonder, then, that this energy must be brought under the Holy Spirit's control. In this lesson we will look at the last of the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit: self-control, which is the fruit of discipline. The person who is allowing the Holy Spirit to conform him into the image of Jesus will develop self-control in every area of his life.

lesson outline

Self-Control Identified

Self-Control Described

Self-Control Illustrated

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Give biblical and secular definitions of self-control.
2. Describe the balanced or self-controlled life.
3. Determine areas of control in your life where you need the help of the Holy Spirit.

learning activities

1. Study this lesson in the same way you have studied the preceding lessons.
2. As background for this lesson read Romans 8.
3. Take the self-test and check your answers.

key words

abstaining	balance	mastery
abstention	debauchery	moderation
abstinence	excesses	sensual
abuses	gluttony	subjection
antidote	indulgence	temperance
asceticism		

lesson development

SELF-CONTROL IDENTIFIED

Biblical Definitions

Objective 1. Give biblical and secular definitions of self-control.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

It is God’s plan that, beginning with salvation, the believer will be led to a self-controlled life. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11–12). Self-control as the fruit of the Spirit is the self-denial of evil desires or pleasures. Self-control stands in contrast with the last two “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:21)—drunkenness and orgies—which refer to excessive indulgence in an activity.

The original word translated “self-control” is *enkrateia*, which appears in its noun form in only three passages: Galatians 5:22, Acts 24:25, and 2 Peter 1:6. In Galatians 5:22 it is used to name the last of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit. In Acts 24:25 Paul employed the term as he talked to Felix about “righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.” In 2 Peter 1:5–6 the word is used in the list of graces: “add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control.”

The basic idea of *enkrateia* is that of strength, power, or mastery over self. It is self-rule. This is what we should do: rule ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Self-control as the fruit of the Spirit is self-discipline.

The verb form related to self-control is *enkrateuomai*, which is used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 to describe the strict training and discipline of athletes who are striving to win the prize. The analogies of the athlete and the soldier are often present in Paul’s writings. They both evidently speak of self-discipline, which is

essential in sports and military activities. Paul encourages the Corinthians to “run in such a way as to get the prize” (v. 24). He goes on to say, “I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (vs. 26–27). Paul is not speaking here of inflicting his body with lashes from a rod; he is speaking of keeping his body in subjection, controlling desires that are not pleasing to God.

The athlete who works hard to train his body only when his coach is watching will never win the prize. The driver who obeys the traffic signal only when a policeman is nearby is not practicing self-control. The worker who slows down on the job when the foreman is absent is not self-disciplined. All of these demonstrate an outward appearance of conforming to the expectations of another without any real change taking place on the inside.

The verb form *enkrateuomai* is also used in 1 Corinthians 7:9 in reference to the Christian’s mastery over sexual desires: “But if they [the unmarried] cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” In our last lesson we learned that *praotes* (gentleness) included the idea of self-control in the area of anger: being angry at the right times, and not being angry at the wrong times. *Enkrateia* refers more to control of more sensual passions than anger, such as mastery over sexual desires or moderation in eating and drinking. In other words, self-control is mastery over the desires of the self.

Application

- 1 Which definitions represent the biblical concept of self-control?
- a) Burning with passion
 - b) Refusing to eat or drink anything that gives pleasure
 - c) Self-discipline in daily habits
 - d) Mastery over evil or selfish desires
 - e) Punishing my body because of its strong desires
 - f) Power to overcome temptation
 - g) Self-rule through Holy Spirit guidance

- 2** The apostle Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27 that we who are followers of Christ should
- a)** keep our bodies in subjection through forms of punishment such as avoiding pleasurable experiences.
 - b)** by strict training learn to control our desires so that we will be worthy of the Lord’s approval.
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Secular Definitions

Plato called *enkrateia* “self-mastery”—a person’s mastery over his desires and his love of pleasure. He also said it is the opposite of over-indulgence in food and sex. One Bible scholar warns that carrying this too far leads to asceticism, which is the abstaining from meat, wine, and marriage. He suggests that asceticism is a departure from the New Testament standard of self-control. We will discuss this concept more later in the lesson.

Aristotle describes the self-controlled person as one who has powerful passions but keeps them under control. He sees the person who lacks self-control as not deliberately choosing to do that which is wrong, but as having no strength to resist temptation.

In secular Greek the term *enkrateia* is used to describe the virtue of an emperor who never allows his personal interests to influence his governing of the people.

Application

- 3** Read Romans 7:14–20. Paul’s description of the unspiritual man is similar to which of these?
- a)** The concept of asceticism
 - b)** The emperor who is not influenced by personal desires
 - c)** Aristotle’s description of the person who lacks self-control
 - d)** Plato’s illustration of over-indulgence in food and sex
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The Secret to Self-Control

In Ephesians 5:18 the apostle Paul makes a contrast between getting drunk on wine and being filled with the Holy Spirit:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Lack of self-control leads to excesses, to an emphasis on satisfying the sinful desires of the flesh. The best antidote is to be filled with the Spirit. The person who is filled with the Spirit is under the Spirit’s control, and he has help in gaining mastery over his weakness. The apostle Paul explains how this works:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:5–9)

Can you see a similarity between Paul’s explanation and the words of Jesus in John 3:6, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit?” Without the help of the Holy Spirit our natural tendencies are to give in to our sinful desires. But when we are born of the Spirit, the new nature within us causes us to want what the Spirit wants for us. Even so, we find the need stressed by the apostle to keep being filled with the Spirit so that we put to death daily sinful desires and thus fulfill the Spirit’s desires.

Application

4 Explain in your own words what the secret is to gaining control over evil desires.

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SELF-CONTROL DESCRIBED

A Balanced Life

Objective 2. *Describe the balanced or self-controlled life.*

The principle of balance is one of the natural laws of the universe. God's perfect control of nature is mentioned in the book of Job: "Stop and consider God's wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? Do you know how the clouds hang poised?" (Job 37:14–16).

Balance is also the subject of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. The author says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven" (v. 1). God desires that Christians have balanced lives. This includes spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional balance. For example, the apostle Paul wrote chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians to stress the importance of balance in the church in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, and to emphasize the need for the gifts to be balanced by love. In the Corinthian church there were abuses in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. But in the church at Thessalonica there was too much control, which also caused imbalance. These believers were hindering the Spirit's working and even despising the gifts of the Spirit, mainly the most cherished one—prophecy (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19–20). These two examples illustrate the need for balance in every area of our lives.

All of the human powers God has given to us, such as the capacity to reason, to feel, and to exercise our will, have the possibility of being abused. That is why we need the Holy Spirit's help to learn self-control so that there will be balance in our lives in the exercise of these powerful forces.

A balanced life is a life of temperance or moderation. As we mentioned earlier, this does not mean asceticism, which is total abstention from such things as meat, wine, or marriage. In 1 Timothy 4:3–4 the apostle Paul warns Timothy not to listen to the teachings of hypocritical liars who teach asceticism:

They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created

to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Certainly there are things from which the Christian must totally abstain. These are the acts of the sinful nature which we listed in Lesson 1 (see Galatians 5:19–21, Romans 1:29–31, Romans 3:12–18, and Mark 7:22–23). But God has created many good things for us to enjoy in moderation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the limitations given in the Word of God. Look at what the Bible says about self-control in specific areas of our lives.

1. *Control of the tongue.* Self-control begins with the tongue. James 3:2 tells us, “If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.” James goes on to describe how difficult it is for us to control our tongue.

Application

5 Read James 3:2–12. What words show us that we must have the help of the Holy Spirit in order to control our tongue?

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The person who truly desires to have the fruit of self-control must start by allowing the Holy Spirit to control his tongue. The tongue which is under the control of the Holy Spirit cannot at the same time praise its Lord and Father and curse people, who have been made in God’s likeness.

2. *Control of sexual desire.* The physical union of a husband and wife is honorable and blessed of God. In 1 Corinthians 7 the apostle Paul gives instruction for the proper control of sexual desire within marriage. He goes on to say that if the unmarried

and widows “cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (vv. 8–9). The word *control* is translated from *enkrateuomai*, the same verb used for self-control as the fruit of the Spirit. People willing to remain unmarried need the “enkrateuomai” of the Holy Spirit to control normal sexual desires. The importance of this control is made clear in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7:

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Application

- 6** According to this Scripture, the greatest danger for one who lacks self-control in sexual desire is that it is a sin against
- a)** God.
 - b)** his own body.
 - c)** another person.
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3. *Moderation in daily habits.* In 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 the apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of honoring God with your body. Not only is he speaking about sexual immorality in this passage, but also about any other practice which would dishonor your body and thus dishonor God. Paul writes, “Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both” (vs. 12–13).

Application

7 What words in this Scripture passage speak of having control in every area of your life?

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Gluttony and drunkenness are sinful habits of self-indulgence which we are warned against in Scripture: “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor” (Proverbs 23:20–21). How can we condemn someone for drunkenness when we eat excessive amounts of food and do harm to our bodies by overweight? Many of us need the help of the Holy Spirit to learn self-control or moderation in our eating habits.

4. *Moderation in the use of time.* Probably the greatest example of self-indulgence in the Bible is the rich fool who said to himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19). Jesus stressed the importance of using our time wisely in his discourse on watchfulness (Luke 12:35–48). A balanced life will give the right amount of time to work, to Bible study and prayer, to rest and leisure. The man who is so devoted to his work that he neglects his family has not learned the proper control of his time. The person who is lazy or who wastes his time in worthless activities does not have self-control. The apostle Paul exhorts us, “Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled” (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8).

5. *Self-control of the mind.* “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14). “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”

(Philippians 4:8). These two Scripture verses tell us how to control our minds—don't think about evil things, and do think about good things. Today there are many attractions that can take our minds off our responsibilities to God. What you read, watch, listen to, or expose yourself to will affect your mind. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to keep our thoughts on what pleases Him.

Application

8 Which of these terms are used to describe a biblical concept of self-control?

- a)** Extreme behavior or expression
- b)** Temperance
- c)** Asceticism
- d)** Balance
- e)** Excesses
- f)** Moderation
- g)** Self-indulgence

9 Which of these statements are TRUE descriptions of a balanced or self-controlled Christian life?

- a)** A balanced life has neither too much control nor too little control.
- b)** Asceticism is a necessary part of self-control because the Bible teaches that we should avoid any form of pleasure.
- c)** There are some things from which a Christian must abstain if he wants to have a self-controlled life.
- d)** In considering areas in a person's life where self-control is needed, control of the tongue would be the least important.
- e)** One secret to self-control is not to be mastered by anything.
- f)** The suggested biblical solution for one who cannot control sexual desire is to marry.
- g)** Any activity is permissible if done in moderation.
- h)** It is possible to have self-control over the mind by refusing to think about things that might lead one to sin.
- i)** Self-control of time means proper balance between work, worship, and leisure.
- j)** The glutton has more self-control than the drunkard.



A Holy Life

More than anything else, God wants you to be holy! This is emphasized many times in Scripture:

I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy (Leviticus 11:45).

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us . . . to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (Luke 1:68–69, 74–75).

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

The Holy Spirit is the power who perfects holiness in us and makes Christ a living reality in our lives. He does this by producing in us the fruit of self-control. He shows that there can be no mixture between darkness and light (evil and good). He creates in us the desire to separate ourselves from the sinful world and to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

We mentioned earlier in this lesson that self-control for a Christian is really Spirit-control. That is what the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans 8:8–10:

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not

belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness [holiness].

Thus, self-control as the fruit of the Spirit counteracts all the works of the sinful nature. Once you are saved and the Holy Spirit indwells your life, you are no longer under bondage to the sinful nature. However, throughout your earthly life you will need to exercise disciplined control over fleshly desires. The flesh (sinful nature) will do everything it can to regain control of your life. But as you surrender control to the Holy Spirit, He keeps the flesh from having power over you. This makes effective self-control possible.

To be holy means to be Christlike. The characteristics which are called the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 are the characteristics of Christ which are produced in us by the Holy Spirit as we submit ourselves to His control. Self-control is the characteristic which makes it possible for us to separate ourselves from the world and unto God. It is the process by which holiness is perfected in us.

Application

10 Explain briefly the process by which the Holy Spirit perfects holiness in you.

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SELF-CONTROL ILLUSTRATED

Objective 3. *Determine areas of control in your life where you need the help of the Holy Spirit.*

The Example of Jesus

The Bible tells us that Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). This is a perfect example of self-control under the power of the Holy

Spirit. Let's look at Luke's account of the devil's temptation of Jesus. We note these things in Luke 4:1–13:

1. At the time Jesus was tempted, He was full of the Holy Spirit.
2. The devil looked for an area of weakness in Jesus. Knowing that He had fasted for forty days, Satan knew that Jesus was hungry. So the temptation came with the suggestion of food.
3. Jesus did not allow His mind to dwell on His desire for food, but He drew upon His knowledge of Scripture to ward off the temptation of His enemy.
4. As the devil continued to tempt Him, Jesus responded by reminding the devil of what God's Word instructed.
5. After the devil had finished all this tempting, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

You will note in this example that the man Jesus did not try to rely on His human powers of resistance to ward off the devil. He was full of the Holy Spirit, acting in the power of the Spirit. You will also note that He controlled His thoughts by keeping His mind on the Word of God. Nothing the devil could say or do to entice Him had any effect. Jesus had complete self-control by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Requirement for Leaders

One of the important requirements for leadership in the New Testament church was self-control, as revealed by these Scripture passages:

1. 1 Timothy 3:1–2—The overseer or bishop is to be temperate, self-controlled.
2. 1 Timothy 3:8—Deacons are not to indulge in much wine.
3. 1 Timothy 3:11—The deacon's wife is to be temperate.

4. Titus 1:7–8—Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be. . . self-controlled, holy and disciplined.

5. Titus 2:2, 6—The older men must be taught to be temperate—the younger men should be encouraged to be temperate.

6. Titus 2:3–5—The older women must be self-controlled so they can teach the younger women to be self-controlled.

Application

11 What lessons do you see in the example of Jesus which can help you to have self-control and resist the devil?

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12 Why is it important for leaders to be self-controlled?

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13 To conclude this lesson, evaluate your own life to determine where you need the help of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of self-control. Make this a matter of earnest prayer and daily practice.

I HAVE SELF-CONTROL OVER	Always	Usually	Often	Seldom	I NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT'S HELP
Eating habits					
Alcohol					
Drugs					
My time					
Sexual needs					
My mind					
Wrong desires					
Bad habits					
My tongue					



self-test

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Select the one best answer to each question.

- 1** Another term for self-control is
 - a)** self-indulgence.
 - b)** asceticism.
 - c)** abstention.
 - d)** self-discipline.

- 2** Two examples of excessive indulgence are
 - a)** eating and drinking.
 - b)** drunkenness and orgies.
 - c)** temperance and moderation.
 - d)** strict training and running a race.

- 3** *Enkrateia* refers to the control of
 - a)** sensual passions.
 - b)** anger.
 - c)** other people.
 - d)** the gifts of the Spirit.

- 4** Asceticism is the practice of
 - a)** self-control.
 - b)** eating meat and drinking wine in excess.
 - c)** abstaining from such things as meat, wine, and marriage.
 - d)** sexual immorality.

- 5** When the Bible teaches that leaders should be temperate, this means they should
 - a)** take authority over others.
 - b)** not do anything to excess.
 - c)** abstain from pleasurable activities.
 - d)** give all of their time to their work.

- 6** Self-control begins with the control of
 - a)** the tongue.
 - b)** sexual desires.
 - c)** time.
 - d)** the mind.

7 Which is the best explanation of what you must do to have the fruit of self-control produced in you by the Holy Spirit?

- a)** You must turn control of your life over to the Holy Spirit, and be sensitive to His prompting for the appropriate conduct of your life.
- b)** You must depend upon your own human powers of resistance to counteract the temptations of the devil which would cause you to lose control.

8 In dividing our time between work, worship, and leisure, the Bible teaches that we should

- a)** spend most of our time in activities related to worship.
- b)** have a balanced life, giving appropriate time to each of these activities.
- c)** give emphasis first to work, then to worship, and avoid leisure.

TRUE-FALSE. If the statement is TRUE, write T in the blank space. If it is FALSE, write F.

... **9** In Romans 7 Paul describes the unspiritual man as being unwilling to resist temptation.

... **10** The secret to self-control is Spirit-control.

... **11** A balanced life is noted by extreme behavior.

... **12** The word temperance means abstaining from alcoholic drinks.

... **13** Holiness is impossible without self-control.

... **14** According to the Bible, leaders are the only ones who need the fruit of self-control.

answers to study questions

- 7** “I will not be mastered by anything” (v. 12).
- 1** c) Self-discipline in daily habits.
d) Mastery over evil or selfish desires.
f) Power to overcome temptation.
g) Self-rule through Holy Spirit guidance.
- 8** b) Temperance
d) Balance
f) Moderation
- 2** b) by strict training learn to control our desires so that we will be worthy of the Lord’s approval.
- 9** a) True
b) False
c) True
d) False
e) True
f) True
g) False
h) True
i) True
j) False
- 3** c) Aristotle’s description of the person who lacks self-control.
- 10** Your answer should be similar to this: It is through the fruit of self-control that we are able to separate ourselves from the world and unto God. To do this, we must turn control of our lives over to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce the characteristics of Christ in us.
- 4** Your answer. I would say the secret is to be filled with the Spirit and to allow the Holy Spirit to have control of my life. Then I will want to do what pleases Him.
- 11** Your answer. This example shows me that I need the power of the Holy Spirit at all times, and I need to keep my mind on the Word of God in order to combat the enemy.

- 5** No man can tame the tongue (v. 8).
- 12** Because leaders are an example to others, and they cannot teach others to be self-controlled unless they, too, are self-controlled.
- 6** a) God
- 13** Your answer. Remember that the Holy Spirit will never force His control upon you—you must yield Him control, so that He can produce in you the fruit of self-control.