

# Lesson Nine

## Self-Control

### Introduction

Solomon insisted that the value of a trained general whose brilliant strategies win wars and save lives is not as great as that of a person who is self-controlled. Proverbs 16:32 says, “Better . . . a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” No wonder he also warns, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28).

*Egkrateia* (pronounced eng-krat-I'-ah) is the Greek word Paul uses for self-control, his final descriptor of what a life directed by the faith-giving Spirit of God will look like. It refers to the person who is the master of his desires, his passions, his sensual appetites. When a person is in control of himself, the acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-21) cannot exert themselves. Self-control erects towering, solid city walls to block “*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.*”

### Studying God’s Word

The Holy Spirit’s gift of self-control allows the other evidences of his presence in our lives to demonstrate themselves. His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness all come to flower because of self-control. Let’s look for that characteristic in Jesus’ life and then learn its role in our own lives.

#### Ideal Self-Control

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

1. Describe how, for the 40 days before beginning his public ministry, Jesus demonstrated his self-control.

2. Identify the core temptations Satan used against Jesus.
  
3. One way to consider Satan's attacks is to see them as ways he hoped to break Jesus' self-control. Look again at the "acts of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:19-21). Name the ones that come into play in Satan's strategy to get Jesus to sin.
  
4. How does Jesus protect himself from Satan's attacks? What can we learn from that?

## His Word in My Life

1. Satan tempts us Christians to put off self-control. Rate from 1 to 4 the groups of sins he is most likely to use to break your self-control.
  - \_\_\_ sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery
  - \_\_\_ idolatry and witchcraft
  - \_\_\_ hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy
  - \_\_\_ drunkenness, orgies
  
2. It's obvious here and in many other places in the gospels that Jesus lived a modest and simple life. Possessions were not a concern for him. His priorities did not even include food or a roof over his head. Give yourself a grade on how well you demonstrate self-control when it comes to material possessions. For example, if Jesus were living next door, would
  - Jesus' car be worth more or less than yours? How much more or less?
  - Jesus own the same amount of clothing you have in your closet? How much would Jesus spend on clothes in a year?
  - Jesus live in the same kind of house you live in? If not, how much larger or smaller would it be? What amenities would it have or would it not have?
  - Jesus spend as much on food as you do? How often would Jesus eat out in a month? What would his weekly supper menu be like?
  
3. What is the difference between a Christian who is self-controlled and one who is controlled by an outside force, like by the threats of God's law?

# Studying God's Word

## Living Out the Spirit's Self-Control

Athletes in Paul's day, as well as in our own, relied on a huge amount of self-control in order to prepare their bodies for competition. Unwholesome food, wine, partying, and sexual indulgence were off-limits during training. Early rising and regular bedtime, body-bruising exercises, focusing on doing everything humanly possible to win consumed them. Paul uses athletes as an illustration of the Spirit's self-control.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

*<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

1. Paul encourages that when it comes to self-control, Christians act like athletes. What parallels do you see between the actions below and your quest for self-control?
  - Run in such a way as to get the prize.
  - Go into strict training.
  - Do not run like a man running aimlessly; do not fight like a man beating the air.
  - Beat your body and make it your slave.
2. In verse 25 the apostle reminds us Christians of why we will want to train even harder, with even more self-governance than any Olympic-level athlete. Identify that reason.
3. Why is keeping a focus on the eternal crown that Jesus won for us essential to staying self-controlled?
4. Share some practical ways you use this motivation to stay in control of your sinful nature.
5. How is Paul's advice here similar to what he says in Ephesians 4:22-24? (*<sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* ) How is the motivation for self-control the same?
6. One place Paul describes how self-control will show itself is in 1 Corinthians 16:2. (*<sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*)

How is self-control called for here?

## His Word in My Life

Living self-controlled lives is not easy, especially in a country that offers its citizens so much. We are not required by our faith to subsist only on the bare essentials of life. But we are easily tempted to turn that into a license to live on much more than we need, while denying help to others who lack the basics of life or, worse, the basics of eternal life.

1. Consider how a lack of self-control can be seen in:
  - Television viewing habits
  - Use of the Internet/social media
  - Failure to work at communication within our marriage or family
  - Overeating (remember last Thanksgiving?)
  - Drinking more than normal servings of alcohol, coffee, soft drinks
  - Inability to maintain a regular personal time for Bible reading and prayer
2. Evaluate: Paul places self-control at the end of his list of the fruit of the Spirit to remind us what it will take to live that kind of life.
3. Agree or disagree. If we fail to control ourselves, then our feelings, our appetites, and our drives will control us.

## Summary

“Better . . . a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” The Christian in whom the Spirit’s self-control flourishes is a wonderful treasure—to his family, his community, and himself. Self-control springs from gratitude for the God-controlled grace that brought us forgiveness for all sins, even our selfishness.