

## Living a Fruitful Life Temperance or Self-control

**Intro: British statesman Edmund Burke argued, “men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there is without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters. Imprimis, Vol. 20, #9**

**Hopefully the message is not obscured by Burke’s eloquence. The point is, either we as a people must learn to control ourselves or we must surrender our freedom to the control of something outside ourselves. Without self-control we are destined either for slavery or self-destruction.**

**This is not only true in our national political life, but also in our spiritual life. Peter makes temperance or self-control an essential quality in his list of seven virtues all disciples should have:**

*Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control...; (2 Peter 1:5-6)*

**Though the word “self-control” is found infrequently in Scripture (six times in the NT), that does not at all diminish its importance in the Christian’s life.**

### **What is the meaning of the word “enkrateia”?**

Enkrateia means “dominion over the self or something,” with the nuances of “steadfastness” and “self-control”.

Classical philosophers like Aristotle wrote frequently on this virtue. Aristotle said self-control is the “the ability to restrain desire by reason, when it is set on base enjoyments and pleasures, and to be resolute and ever in readiness to endure natural want and pain” (Barclay, p. 126).

Barclay offers this insight into enkrateia: “When the word enters the moral and ethical sphere it describes that strength of soul by which a man takes a hold of himself, takes a grip of himself, is in full control and possession of himself, so that he can restrain himself from every evil desire (Barclay, p. 123). Hence it is “victory over desire”.

There are times when we feel the need to say to someone, “Get a grip!” or “Get a hold of yourself!” Such expressions capture the idea of the word.

### **Where is self-control especially needed?**

Actually self-control is needed in all areas of Christian living, but there are some key areas where self-control is especially important.

*In the expression of our emotions, especially anger*

*Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit. (Prov. 25:28)*

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. (Prov. 16:32)*

#### ***In controlling our tongues***

*If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. (Jas. 1:26)*

#### ***In our sexual desires***

Self-control is needed in respecting God's laws about marriage, in abstaining from sexual immorality either before or after we're married. *And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you." (Ac. 24:25)*

Paul's message of self-control had touched a raw nerve in Felix who was notorious for his sexual misconduct. But a spiritual person restrains desire by reason. He knows what God's will is and that such relationships are destructive to all involved.

#### ***In our pursuit of wealth and pleasure***

We see the mad quest for wealth at the expense of everything else. Such people need to be warned about the dangers of a love of money. *But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)*

If there are those who can't stop pursuing riches, then there are those who pursue pleasure with a sense of entitlement that says I deserve the good life. To live beyond one's means not only shows a lack of self-control, but it raises the more fundamental issues of contentment and humble acceptance of our portion from God.

*But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. (1 Tim. 6:6-8)*

### **How can we have more self-control?**

***We need to recognize the fact that God expects us to master our thoughts and begin with the heart.***

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. (Mt. 23:25)*

It will not please the Lord to try to present a "front" of control but inwardly be uncontrolled

***We need to change our circumstances to avoid temptation***

The Lord taught this principle in an astounding hyperbole.

*And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (Mt. 5:29)*

It may mean choosing new friends! It may mean leaving not going to certain places where we are tempted.

***Refrain from the use of that which inhibits our self-control.***

We must avoid things such as alcohol; other drugs.

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)*

Ironically the day that Abraham Lincoln died he is said to have purposed as his next goal of Presidency after Reconstruction of the nation to bring to an end the sale of alcohol. The very night he died, John Wilkes Booth visited the local saloon to prepare himself for his assassination of Lincoln. Ironically, Lincoln's body guard left the theater to go to the same saloon. Those two drinks led to the assassination of that great man!

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (Eph. 5:18)*

The disciple is not under the influence of drink, but the Holy Spirit! Christians should never be out of control because of intoxicants; but they should want to always be in the control of the Holy Spirit!

***Concentrate on the ultimate goal of heaven***

*And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Cor. 9:25)*

To an Olympic gymnast, the gold is everything! They are willing to invest hours and hours for years for a few minutes competition. What self-control they manifest!

What do you really want in life? Have you made going to heaven your ultimate priority?!!

**Conclusion: This is a representation of Alexander. He was a victorious general at 16, ruled all of Macedonia at 18, and was made king at 20. By the age of 33 had he conquered the world and has earned in history the title “Alexander...the Great.”**

**But consider this: On the way home from his many conquests while at Babylon he spent the bulk of his time in carousing with his soldiers. On the second night of such carousing he drank to all of his company and taking the cup of Hercules drank till he passed out. He died a few days later. Here was a man who conquered the world; but did not possess the power to conquer himself!**

**The world is full of people out of control (2 Tim. 3:3). It needs an example of those who have their act together, who have taken hold of their lives, and are serving God. We can be those people. In fact, that's God's plan for our lives. A part of the good news of the gospel is that if your life is out of control, Christ can help you put things back together again. Come and obey Him.**