

Self-Control: “Add to Your Faith...Self-Control”
I Corinthians 9:19-27; 2 Peter 1:3-7

Definitions:

Self-Control (n)—restraint imposed by oneself on one’s own actions.

Restraint (n)—the action of keeping someone or something under control.

Temperance (n)—the quality of moderation or self-restraint.

Personal freedom is a wonderful aspect of living in a free society and being a child of God. But, personal freedom can be like a highway with a ditch on either side. One ditch called legalism and the other licentiousness. Licentiousness is the disregarding of accepted rules or conventions. Legalism limits freedom with carefully defined structures and restrictions; licentiousness celebrates freedom and encourages the enjoyment of it to the point of excess, which eventually destroys the very thing it celebrates.

In a sense, self-control involves handling this freedom properly and not falling into either ditch. The Greek word for self-control literally means “self-mastery.” Our goal should be to master those things that would mar our lives in such a way that we can be liberated to serve God and others in glorious freedom. In other words, “master things before they master you.”

Imagine. You’re on a diet. As you pick up a magazine, you turn innocently to the food section. “After all,” you say to yourself “pictures aren’t fattening.” As you pore over every page, each dessert looks better than the last one. You decide to read in the kitchen because the “light is better.” After a few minutes you begin thinking about the ice cream in the freezer. A model of restraint, you decide to get only one spoonful—well, two at the most. Pretty soon you’ve eaten a whole quart! Sound familiar? We all struggle with self-control. And temptations often blinds our better judgment.

Think about it, which of the following motivations for personal discipline or self-control did you grow up with?

“Remember: God sees everything.”

“What will the neighbors think?”

“Christians don’t do that.”

“Use your own judgment.”

“Anything goes!”

1. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27.

- Paul’s motivation and ultimate purpose for limiting and adapting his own freedom was that he may gain more for Christ.
- Being all things to all people carries the dangers of: 1) you conforming to being like the others and forsaking your beliefs, or 2) or compromising on things to fit in. One has to set boundaries and limits and be strong in their faith.

The Fruit of the Spirit (Fisherman Bible Study); *Fruit of The Spirit* (Life Guide Bible Studies), *Fruit of The Spirit* (Zondervan); *New American Standard Bible*; *Amplified Holy Bible*; *Open Bible KJV*

- Self-control limits those dangers and frees the Christian by setting up “guardrails” and keeping the Christian on course and in the “lanes” set by God’s standards. To refer back to what was stated earlier, self-control keeps us out of the ditch of legalism and the one of licentiousness.
- The analogy of an athlete is a good one for the Christian walk (life) because to be good at both requires discipline and self-control. Training is required and limits and boundaries must be set in place. Both take commitment. Both compete or participate for a prize—the athlete for a temporary fading award, the Christian for an eternal reward.
- Think about it, what aspects of your own Christian walk require more self-control and discipline? Ask God to help you to further develop those aspects.

2. Read 2 Peter 1:3-7.

- God, by His divine power has given us all that pertain unto life and godliness through knowledge of Him. He also has given us great and precious promises that we can be partakers of the divine nature or godly lives.
- Because we are all at different levels in our spiritual lives, and have different needs, what’s most for each individual on the list from **2 Peter 1:5-7**, differs. We must ask God to help us in the areas where we each need help.
- Self-control and perseverance are related because to persevere—to continue in a course of action even in the face of difficulty or with little or no prospect of success—often requires self-control. The restraint of denying one’s self and staying the course takes mastering one’s self.
- The list in **2 Peter 1:5-7** is very similar to the list in **Galatians 5:22-23**. Faith, temperance (self-control), patience (longsuffering), godliness, kindness, and charity (love) are on both lists. Joy, peace, meekness, and gentleness are not on the **2 Peter** list.
- When the struggle against sin or the demands of disciplined living get too heavy, turn again to our living Lord who loves us and will give us grace to keep going. He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane but ultimately prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done.” Ask for God’s Spirit to empower you to make the necessary decisions and adjustments to be able to pray this, too, and to make it stick. This is self-control; that is the Spirit Life. The Holy Spirit brings about these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit.

Here is a list of five areas that often need “mastering in our lives” and scriptures that give insight for practicing self-control in these areas.

1. Controlling Our Tongue (**James 3:1-12**)
2. Controlling Our Body (**1 Corinthians 6:12-20**)
3. Controlling Our Desires (**James 4:1-10**)

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4. Controlling Our Appetites (**Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35; 28:7**)
5. Controlling Our Finances (**1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19**)

As we think back over the topics and passages we have studied, the fruit of the Spirit is to be seen not as a collection of unrelated fruits that can be selected according to personal preference. It, the fruit of the Spirit, is a composite description of our lives. Our all-around behavior is the direct result of a relationship with the living Lord who dwells in His people by His Spirit.

As we close out this study, the fruit of the Spirit is most definitely the result of inner workings of the blessed Holy Spirit, without which no such thing as a Spirit life would be possible. But, there is also a human factor. The Spirit life is a product of both Spirit activity and human response. It comes from *obedience* to God's commands to love, be patient, kind, and self-controlled, but it also requires *dependence* on God's power through the Spirit, to make it possible.

Pray for renewed vigor in living the Spirit life.