

Self-Control

by Wayne Goff

“Self-control” (“temperance” - κἰν) is the last but not the least of the “fruit of the Spirit” given by Paul to the Galatian brethren. It is commended to every Christian in order to inherit the kingdom of God!

Self-Control (Temperance)

Self-control comes from a word in the original language which literally means “*in strength*.” The meaning we are to understand is that the Christian is to develop control of all the human passions and desires. One commentary wrote: “This stands opposed both to the ‘fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness’ and to the ‘drunkenness, and revelings’ before mentioned.” [*Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 20, p. 262]. And in comparing the self-control of the Christian to machinery, said: “Like the governor in machinery, it adds nothing to the power at work, but it equalizes this power so as to produce a uniform type of work.” [*ibid.*, p. 274]. Indeed, self-control “describes that strength of soul by which a man takes a hold of himself, takes a grip on himself, is in full control and possession of himself, so that he can restrain himself from every evil desire” [*Flesh & Spirit*, p. 123].

The **noun** form of the word only appears a few times in the New Testament. It is mentioned here as a “*fruit of the Spirit*” which tells us that if we are walking in the Will of God that we will learn how to control ourselves *morally*. It was part of Paul’s sermon to Felix in Acts 24:25 which caused him to tremble in fear! (And no wonder, since Felix had married Drusilla as his third “wife,” and he was her second “husband,” having unlawfully left her husband for him. They needed to know about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.) And self-control is listed twice in 2 Peter 1:6 as that in which the Christian should grow to secure his eternal reward. It follows immediately after “*knowledge*,” perhaps indicating the Christian put into practical, moral application that which he has learned intelligently.

The contrast then between self-control and unrestraint is the difference between the Christian’s life and the worldling’s. It is the difference between *governed* passions and drunkenness, revelings, and fornication. **The contrast is both stark and revealing!** Those professed Christians among us who plead that they cannot help themselves, or that they cannot live without this or that fulfilled desire have drunk deeply of the cesspool of libertinism and are jeopardizing their souls and filling the church with worldliness. Self-control is not only a *desired* virtue, it is a *prerequisite* to eternal salvation! “Though we may count it the lowest and least, yet as indispensable to our salvation as the love of God itself. For the lack of this safeguard how many a saint has stumbled into folly and shame!” [*An Exposition of the Bible*, vol. 5, p. 907].

The **verb** form of our word is found in 1 Corinthians 9:25 when Paul wrote: “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” Joseph Henry Thayer explained that Paul alluded to “a figure drawn from athletes, who in preparing themselves for the games abstained from unwholesome food, wine, and sexual indulgence ...” [*Thayer’s Gk.-English Lexicon*, p. 167]. And Paul’s argument is that if athletes can so control themselves to win a first place ribbon, certainly we can do even better in order to obtain our eternal reward!

Certainly the need and importance of self-control is much ignored in our modern hedonistic society. So let us consider that God gives us the means whereby we can learn self-control and He requires us to be exercised accordingly.

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