

BIBLE TOOLS

Search BIBLES | DEFINITIONS | TOPICAL STUDIES | LIBRARY | EMAIL | ABOUT

Topical Studies

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [J](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [Q](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [X](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)



What the Bible says about Self Control

(From *Forerunner Commentary*)

Self-mastery ("soberly" in NKJV) is self-government or self-control, the foundation of a strong godly life, growth, and producing fruit. If a person cannot govern himself, if he cannot master his passions, he will certainly not have a good relationship with his fellowman or [God](#). His life will likely be marked by major excesses.

The biblical writers use this word in various ways: to behave in an orderly manner, to be sober, serious, sane, sound-minded, discreet, self-disciplined, prudent, and moderate. In context of a person controlling himself, Paul writes, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of [faith](#)" ([Romans 12:3](#); see [Titus 2:6](#); [I Peter 4:7](#)).

A person who has self-mastery is even-handed, and his passions are under control. He makes proper use of his drives and desires, and his manner of life is not one of extremes. A person reflecting this quality will be making steady progress in growing into the perfectly balanced character of [Jesus Christ](#).

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Five Teachings of Grace](#)

Related Topics: [Desire](#) | [Growth](#) | [Moderation](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Relationships](#) | [Sanctification](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Sober \(minded\)](#)

[Genesis 25:29-34](#)

How did Esau come to be of a mind that he could sell his birthright so easily? Can we follow the same path but in a spiritual sense? What must we do to cherish rather than despise our far more glorious inheritance?

What Esau despised was no small thing. Even if we disregard the earlier promises given to Abraham and [Isaac](#) of descendants as numerous as the sand of the seashore, the Promised Land of Canaan, royal dynasties, and the gates of their enemies, Esau stood to inherit a literal fortune. As we have learned over the years, the birthright contained a two-fold promise: physical promises and spiritual promises. We can see this in summary in [Genesis 12:1-3](#):

Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

What a wonderful inheritance for Abraham's descendants! [God](#) promises a national homeland, national greatness (power and prosperity), and national prestige. Abraham's descendants would ultimately be a force for good on the planet, especially because from Israel would come the Messiah.

If we consider just what Esau would inherit when Isaac died, it still was quite a huge amount of wealth. In [Genesis 24:35](#), Abraham's servant says to Rebekah's family, "The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys." Just a chapter later, [Moses](#) records, "And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac," except for "gifts" that he bestowed on his other sons by his concubines ([Genesis 25:5-6](#)).

The birthright was customarily passed down from father to eldest son. Being Isaac's eldest son (verse 25), Esau would have stood to gain quite a lot, at least in the way of wealth. A bowl of lentils hardly compares to "flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys"! How could he have despised his awesome inheritance so easily?

What was Esau's problem? He did not treasure his inheritance! [Jesus](#) tells us in His [Sermon on the Mount](#), "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Matthew 6:21](#)). People usually



only sell something when they value something else more. Esau did not place a high-enough value on the birthright, so he sold it for a pittance.

Staff

[What Is Your Lentil Soup?](#)

Related Topics: [Birthright](#) | [Birthright Blessing](#) | [Birthright Promises](#) | [Birthright, Despising](#) | [Esau](#) | [Esau's Temperament](#) | [Esau's Worldliness](#) | [Self Centeredness](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Gratification](#) | [Self Indulgence](#)

[Genesis 25:34](#)

So, what is our particular "bowl of lentils"? For what would we give up everything [God](#) has offered us? For what *are* we giving up our fabulous birthright? What sinful pattern of living could be keeping us from inheriting all things? Is it worth it?

We would like to say, "Nothing," but actions speak louder than words. *Our behavior reveals our beliefs.* If we are acting in a way that despises our birthright, we are showing that our beliefs are no different from Esau's. In fact, if we are participating in behavior contrary to God's standards, that behavior has become our bowl of lentils.

Again, what have we been putting ahead of the promises we could inherit? Our answer identifies our present bowl of lentils.

Esau wanted to be satisfied immediately; he did not want to wait. He wanted the pleasures and satisfactions of the flesh fulfilled instantly. What good was a birthright if it did not satisfy his incredible hunger and thirst right now?

Anything, any [sin](#), any behavior, any thought pattern, any god we place before the Holy One—anything that would keep us from receiving our birthright—is our bowl of lentils. For most of us, these are ingrained patterns of life that we must overcome. Some have been able to hide and camouflage these bowls of lentils from others. It does not matter. God sees all ([Hebrews 4:13](#)).

We could be working so hard laboring for the meat that perishes that we ignore and neglect the spiritual food and promises God has offered us. We could be working so hard at building a relationship with a boss that we do not spend the time building our relationship with the real Master. Perhaps it is sinful worry, the cares of this life, that have pulled us off center. Or, it could be the pleasures of this life, the vanities of this age, or unconquered sins. Any of these could be our bowl of lentil stew that could lead God to conclude we are despising our birthright too.



What are some typical bowls of lentils? [Galatians 5:19-21](#), Paul's list of the "[works of the flesh](#)" is a good place to start. He concludes by saying, "[T]hose who practice such things will not inherit the [kingdom of God](#)" (verse 21).

Are we letting [covetousness](#) become a bowl of lentils? Have we chosen the god of "success" in place of the true God ([Mark 4:18-19](#))?

Does anything each day come ahead of seeking Him and walking with Him? Are there sins of the flesh, of sex, of hate, of worry, of envy that keep us from seeking our birthright diligently?

How about the [Sabbath](#) and holydays? Are we keeping them holy?

The point is clear. Each of us knows what our bowl of lentils is.

We can learn from Esau. He should have gone hungry instead of selling out a fabulous future for literal beans. There will be *many* times when we will have that same decision: despise the birthright—or sacrifice, wait, endure, overcome, and put up with hardship. We have to make sure we choose properly: life ([Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)).

No matter how temporarily enjoyable and satisfying any sin is in that moment, it cannot begin to measure up to the eternal rewards of God's birthright promises. Inheriting our birthright will not be easy. God wants to know beyond any doubt that we value it. That means we will be tested on this point repeatedly. It will take endurance, sacrifice, and keeping our focus on what is eternal and truly valuable ([II Corinthians 4:17-18](#)).

Staff

[What is Your Bowl of Lentil Stew?](#)

Related Topics: [Birthright](#) | [Birthright Promises](#) | [Birthright, Despising](#) | [Endurance](#) | [Esau](#) | [Esau's Temperament](#) | [Esau's Worldliness](#) | [Flesh, Works of the](#) | [Lentil Stew](#) | [Sacrifice](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Spiritual Inheritance](#) | [World's Influence](#) | [Worldliness](#)

[Numbers 11:2-4](#)

This passage expresses what motivates the rest of the story in chapter 11: They yielded to an intense craving. Have we ever had intense cravings? Was there a time when our taste buds were watering away for a piece of chocolate, a sundae, a piece of cake, pie ala mode, or maybe a nice filet mignon? Everybody has, but in most cases something stops us. We either do not have the money or the time or we are not in a place where we can fulfill our desire.



But we should not stop considering this with the desires that emanate from the stomach and taste buds. We desire a lot of things: nice clothing, nice homes, nice automobiles. We desire a husband or a wife. All sorts of desires can become so intense that they begin to drive our lives.

When we get into that kind of an attitude, we will begin to find that our desire is not only dominating our thinking, it is making us do what we do and say what we say. Chances are, if we fail to control it, we will begin to take advantage of situations to satisfy our overwhelming desire. We will take advantage of people, if need be, to satisfy it.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Passover and I Corinthians 10](#)

Related Topics: [Craving](#) | [Desire](#) | [Lust](#) | [Lust of the Flesh](#) | [Satisfaction](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Gratification](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Self Satisfaction](#)

[Numbers 11:4-6](#)

There are quite a number of serious sins exposed in this particular issue - perhaps the most serious being their lack of [faith](#) in God's promise. There they were, eating "angels' food," as Paul calls it - the very best nutrition they could possibly receive - and *it was not good enough!* They had to have something extra, just as all the people in [the world](#) do, and they were willing to go back into captivity to get it. Is that not compromising? Is that not a lack of [self-discipline](#)? Is that not wanting to be like everybody else around them? Is that not seeking after a variety of experiences?

[God](#) is interested in unity, in oneness. There is one way, one God, one religion, one set of commandments, statutes, judgments, and so on. But Israel wanted to be like everybody else. They had the best laws, the best country, the best God, the best Husband, but it is not enough. Whenever self-denial becomes an issue, she did not deny herself to serve and submit to her Husband, God. Is that not serious?

God promises to supply our every need, but in Israel's fearful and fickle discontentment, they did not seek Him to understand what He was doing, but instead, they sought something different from what He was providing them within their relationship with Him. We really need to be aware of this, because this drive for fulfillment in variety is still within the [Israelitish people](#), and therefore in us. God shows us in numerous ways that His desire is for His children to be unified in one system, and that is why He told Israel: one God, one place of worship, one system.

They were permitted only *one* place to keep the [Feast of Tabernacles](#). In my experience in the [Worldwide Church of God](#), people in almost every congregation had to go to a different festival site



every year. When we begin to see that this is immaturity, we realize that not everything that God makes available to us is a right choice for us. God shows this right at the beginning of the Book. In Genesis 3, Eve looked at that forbidden fruit and saw that it was good to eat. She could not deny herself the satisfaction of tasting that luscious looking fruit, even though God said not to.

We (especially those of us who live in America, which is far wealthier than any nation has ever been in the history of mankind) have so many things to choose that it is incredible. But what does God say is our responsibility? He says, "Choose life," and there is more to that word "life" than merely being the opposite of death. By "life," He means choose the things that will be good for *eternal* life.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Where Is the Beast? \(Part Six\)](#)

Related Topics: [Drive for Variety](#) | [Israel's Fickleness](#) | [Israel, Modern](#) | [Manna](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Unity](#) | [Variety, Drive for](#)

[Deuteronomy 14:23-26](#)

Verses 23-26 contains admonitions to go to the place [God](#) chooses, turn the increase into money if needed, and to spend it on whatever the heart desires, rejoicing with each other before God. However, the chapter's theme remains as a vital component of the instruction. God wants us to enjoy the fruit of our labors, as He also does when we obey Him. He also wants our relationship to be many-layered. Our focus, of course, should be off the self, centered on God, and extending outward toward others.

The rest of the chapter addresses this outward orientation with teaching to share with those who are less fortunate. It tells us to make sure that the needy are also able to rejoice and enjoy this time of fellowship and prosperity. The chapter ends by telling us that when we do these things, we give God good reason to bless us in whatever we set out to do.

Throughout these verses, we [see God](#), very active in the lives of His people, admonishing His people to follow His lead. God is quite concerned about His people and His spiritual body. He cares what we do to ourselves both inwardly and outwardly, physically and spiritually ([I Corinthians 3:16-17](#); [Ephesians 2:18-22](#)), and He cares how we treat each other as members of "the body of [Christ](#)" ([I Corinthians 12:27](#)).

While He allows us to partake of things we desire, Deuteronomy 14 shows that God does impose limits; He wants us to exercise self-control. He expects us to be givers and not just takers. This applies to sharing our money, food, drink, activities, and fellowship with others, and we should



make special effort to share ourselves with Him in prayer, study, meditation, and church services during this time of plenty. After all, one of the purposes of going to the Feast is to learn how to fear God, and we do this by spending time with Him.

Staff

[Whatever Your Heart Desires](#)

Related Topics: [Charitable Deeds](#) | [Charity](#) | [Fear of God](#) | [Fear of the Lord](#) | [Fearing God](#) | [Feast of Tabernacles](#) | [Fellowship](#) | [Fellowship of Believers](#) | [Fellowship with Christ](#) | [Fellowship with God](#) | [Love as the Way of Outgoing Concern](#) | [Love for Brethren](#) | [Love for God](#) | [Second Tithe](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Way of Get](#) | [Way of Give](#) | [Whatever Your Heart Desires](#)

[Nehemiah 5:14-15](#)

Few of us know much about Nehemiah or the times he lived in. Our mental picture of him is that he was austere, harsh, and perhaps even pharisaical. From what the Bible presents of him, he was undoubtedly serious about his responsibilities, brave, and circumspect, and he loved and feared [God](#). His character displays a lofty nobleness. Regardless of our estimation, God thinks highly of him, and his life was so remarkable He included a few vignettes of it in His Word for our instruction.

When the Persian king appointed him governor of the Jewish exiles who had returned to the land of Judea from Babylon, Nehemiah discovered that the governors before him were in the habit of "squeezing" the people for their own gain. Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had done the same. Is that not the way people in government operate? Everybody does it! The people would have simply shrugged their shoulders, fully expecting it as the way things are done. It was the custom. Nehemiah's standard, however, was exceedingly higher: His hands must be absolutely clean.

Why did he do it? He feared God! Nehemiah's way of living reached down into the nitty-gritty of everyday life and may have involved considerable sacrifice. He would not operate the way [the world](#) does. Certainly, the laborer is worthy of his hire, but sometimes sacrifices must be made, and Nehemiah determined this was one of them. He would not conform to what everyone else did. Several other vignettes from the same book confirm this was not a one-time occurrence. Unless we are willing to say, "No," to what everybody else is doing, and do it often, our Christian life will be static from its outset.

God and the world do not have the same perspectives on how to live life. Once we have the right standards, God's standards, saying, "No," to ourselves is of paramount importance if we want to put on the [image of God](#) and remove the image of this world. The world, combined with our own carnality, keeps pressuring us to conform to its attitudes and ways, and if we are passive, it is easy



for us to drift with its way of thinking. We must make choices. Sometimes, they are very difficult because of the sacrifice involved. In them, we will show whether we respect God and His purpose or this world.

The fear of God must become a foundation stone to us, one of the kind of nobility and strength of character Nehemiah possessed. It does not matter whether the issue is losing weight because of gluttony or eliminating debt because of [covetousness](#). The people of the world take little notice of God until trouble is already upon them. But we must learn to do all things to glorify God, and it takes deeply respecting Him to do this. Honestly, would [Jesus](#) allow Himself to drift from His focus on glorifying God to become obese or in debt to the point of bankruptcy? His respect for—fear of—God would not permit Him to do these things.

The Christian has to rip himself from the world's way of thinking and doing. He must be a nonconformist in this regard. He must always understand that the world, though mentioning God frequently, does not fear Him, as its conduct shows. [Romans 3:18](#) asserts, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." A Christian must consciously march to the beat of a different drummer.

Why do we not all conduct our life the way Nehemiah did? Partly because of laziness, to a degree because of cowardice, and sometimes because of ignorance. At times, we are so out of touch with God, we become swept up in sinful activity before we are aware what is going on. Yet, at other times, we fail because of this powerful sheep characteristic to give in to the impulse of the moment because everybody else is doing it. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of the majority. It can be every bit as harsh as the tyranny of a despot. Either can put us into bondage. Unless we are willing to look at things through the eyes of God and stand on our own two feet because we fear Him, we will be just as helplessly enslaved to the opinions of the hour as ever.

It is a historical truism that truth on an issue often lies with the minority. The opinions and ways of the majority are often impulsive, taking the path of least resistance without being concerned about the long-range effects. Those in the minority usually have the advantage of thinking things through because they know their ideas will be unpopular and resisted, and so they prepare themselves better.

God is most concerned about how things end, the conclusion of a matter. He wants us to understand what the fruit of an action will be. Nehemiah was willing to be different, a non-conformist if conforming was wrong. His respect for God and what God thought was greater than his fear of what men would think of him or what he would have to deny himself.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part One\): Fear](#)



Related Topics: [Compromise](#) | [Conformed to this World](#) | [Conforming](#) | [Conforming to God's Will](#) | [Covetousness](#) | [Debt](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [God's Standards](#) | [Nehemiah](#) | [Obesity](#) | [Sacrifice](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Standards of Morality](#) | [Standards of Right and Wrong](#) | [World's Influence](#)

[Psalm 11:4-5](#)

[God](#) clearly shows that, just because He makes something available to us—even things that might ordinarily be considered as good—it does not mean that it will be good for us, His called and chosen people. God's eyelids look at the sons of men. He is always testing us to see whether we understand how intimately He is working with us. We are to be a self-controlled people. Our conduct is to be motivated by [faith](#), because we are a distinctive people summoned by the great God for His purposes and His purposes only. God is drawing us into His oneness with Him, and this is why there is so much stress in His word on His one way.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Where Is the Beast? \(Part Seven\)](#)

Related Topics: [Discernment](#) | [Discernment, Growing in](#) | [Discernment, Spiritual](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Yielding to God](#) | [Yielding to God's Will](#)

[Proverbs 4:23-27](#)

The sense of "keep your heart" is that we need to exert more vigilance in guarding our minds than men do over anything else. Governments go to great pains to guard their installations, plans, and secrets, but [God](#) says that it is even more important to guard what we allow to reside in our minds.

Why is this is so important? Because our hearts, our minds, guide and direct everything we do, and if we do not guard and protect them from the ungodly ideas, beliefs, and entertainments, they can cause our spiritual downfall. It is in our minds and hearts that our characters are shaped, and if we allow perverse and unrighteous character to enter, the righteous character that God wants to see in us will never form.

The other instructions that Solomon gives spring from this. He tells us to ponder and control what comes out of our mouth and what we allow our eyes to view. He teaches us to make sure our feet stay on the right path, as well as to work on establishing our habits and manner of living, meaning we should not become involved in insensitive, hasty, careless, and destructive actions. The prophet Haggai puts all this very concisely, "Consider your ways!" ([Haggai 1:5](#), 7).

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

[Remaining Unleavened](#)



Related Topics: [Heart](#) | [Heart, Guarding](#) | [Heart, Keeping](#) | [Heart, Symbol of](#) | [Mind](#) | [Mind Wandering](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Vigilance](#)

[Proverbs 12:24](#)

On a national scale, we might say this contrasts those who diligently guard their freedoms and rule themselves to those who through laziness have been conquered and forced into slavery. Whatever scale we apply to this, Solomon reveals an ethical principal at work. Unless and until he changes his ways, a lazy person will descend to being a servant to others, while a diligent person will grow, prosper, and control his own life.

Spiritually, the stakes are far higher. Those who strive to master themselves—to exercise self-control to live God's way—will rule in the [Kingdom of God](#) ([Revelation 3:21](#); [5:10](#)), while those who slothfully neglect this task could possibly lose everything. Notice Paul's warning in [Hebrews 2:1-3](#):

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him . . . ?

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

[Remaining Unleavened](#)

Related Topics: [Diligence](#) | [Drifting Spiritually](#) | [Laziness](#) | [Neglect](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Slavery](#) | [Sloth](#) | [Slothfulness](#) | [Vigilance](#)

[Proverbs 23:19-21](#)

A lack of self-control is commonly shown in lust, greed, gluttony, alcoholism, conceit, sexual sins, gossiping, violent quarreling, and false and reckless speech, and many other sins that [Satan](#) can tempt us to commit if we allow him.

Martin G. Collins

[Self-Control](#)



Related Topics: [Alcohol Abuse](#) | [Alcoholism](#) | [Conceit](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [Gossip](#) | [Quarreling](#) | [Quarrels](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sexual Immorality](#) | [Sexual Sins](#) | [Speech, False](#) | [Speech, Reckless](#)

Proverbs 23:19-21

These verses are among those often quoted by those who believe that it is wrong to drink alcoholic beverages. They claim that this passage proves it is [sin](#) to drink wine, and by extension, any drink containing alcohol. However, this scripture does *not* say these things. What then does it say?

It warns that:

- » The *excessive* drinking of alcohol is a sin. The winebibber drinks too much and too often.
- » Improper use of alcohol is as poisonous as a snake's venom (verse 32).
- » God's children should avoid company with winebibbers (verse 20; see also [Matthew 24:49](#); [I Corinthians 5:11](#)).
- » Poverty is just one potential negative result of drunkenness (verse 21).
- » Other potential—even probable—negative consequences of chronic drunkenness include woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, bloodshot eyes, hallucinations, nightmares, addiction, lack of self-control in speech and other matters, and bodily injuries without apparent cause—the cause being forgotten because of drunken stupor (verses 29, 33-34).
- » We should not tarry long at wine (verse 30).

On this last warning, we know that a person who lingers where alcohol is consumed can so easily become a winebibber, or in plain, modern English, a drunkard. [God](#), through Paul, lists drunkenness as one of the [works of the flesh](#), warning that no drunkard will inherit God's Kingdom:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: [adultery](#), fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, . . . envy, murders, *drunkenness*, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the [kingdom of God](#). ([Galatians 5:19](#), 21; emphasis ours)

Staff

[Is It a Sin to Drink Alcoholic Beverages?](#)



Related Topics: [Alcohol](#) | [Alcohol Abuse](#) | [Drunkenness](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sin](#) | [Winebibbers](#) | [Works of the Flesh](#)

[Proverbs 23:20](#)

[God](#) considers gluttony a character trait of an evil person, and so He tells us to avoid those who eat and drink too much. In this verse, meat represents food in general since meat partaken in a meal usually indicates a substantially filling meal. Since associating with gluttons could entice us to eat too much, it is wise to avoid close associations with them, as with any willfully sinning person. Familiarity with [sin](#) rubs off on us and wears us down.

Martin G. Collins

[Gluttony: A Lack of Self-Control \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Gluttony](#) | [Lack of Self Control](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Control, Lack of](#)

[Proverbs 25:28](#)

We see a good example of self-control implied in [Proverbs 25:28](#): "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." No specific Hebrew word in this sentence means "self-control," but "rule" certainly implies it. In its comments on this verse, the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states:

The picture is that of a city whose walls have been so nearly destroyed as to be without defense against an enemy; so is the man who has no restraint over his spirit, the source of man's passionate energies. He has no defense against anger, lust, and the other unbridled emotions that destroy the personality. (vol. 4, p. 267)

[Proverbs 16:32](#) shows a more positive side of self-control: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Here Solomon uses an entirely different word for "rule," but the sense of self-control remains. A comparison of the two proverbs reveals the great importance of self-control as both an offensive and defensive attribute.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)



Related Topics: [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit: Self Control](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Mastery](#)

[Proverbs 30:21-23](#)

Each of these illustrations describes people unprepared for their new status. We can be certain that [God](#) will not allow this to happen in His Family Kingdom. Those who are in it will be prepared to live, work, and rule at the level He assigns to them. Their responsibilities will be challenging, but they will not be constantly frustrated due to being in over their heads. Nor will their offices go to their heads. Despite having great power, they will humbly serve, exhibiting no abusive authority in the conduct of their responsibilities. They will be balanced in all areas of life.

Most dynastic rulers, like the monarchs of Europe, understand this concept well. Recently, *Smithsonian Magazine* ran a long article about Marie Antoinette. Her Austrian Hapsburg parents arranged her marriage while she was very young, promising her to the Bourbon family who ruled France. She was to become the wife of the future Louis XVI, also quite young at the time.

Within a year of this arrangement, the Bourbons sent a tutor to Austria to school Marie to become France's queen. The tutor remained her almost constant companion until Marie was married when she was fifteen years old. Prince Charles of England experienced a similar rigorous education. He has been trained since birth to sit on the throne of England. In one sense, especially in his pre-adult years, he had little time for himself.

We might think that this practice has not worked well, but we must not forget that these monarchs lacked the ability from God to discipline their human natures. Nevertheless, God follows the same principle of preparation, and our lives must be devoted to these operations. Thus, we must follow the same basic program laid down for Prince Charles except that our preparations are for the [Kingdom of God](#). Just as Charles must devote himself to learning all the particulars of his kingdom's operations, so must we devote ourselves to learning the ways of God's Kingdom because we, too, are to be kings ([Revelation 5:10](#)). God will not allow us to escape these responsibilities.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Seeking God \(Part Two\): A Foundation](#)

Related Topics: [Human Nature](#) | [Human Nature, Controlling](#) | [Preparation for Future Role](#) | [Preparation for Rulership](#) | [Preparedness](#) | [Responsibilities, Increased](#) | [Responsibility, Sense of](#) | [Responsibility, Varying Levels of](#) | [Seeking God](#) | [Seeking God's Counsel](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#)

[Ecclesiastes 7:8](#)



Solomon's approach is not with [God](#) in mind as our example, but that [patience](#) is prudent in our dealings with others and events. Solomon shows patience to be a very valuable attribute that brings us success in endeavors and favor in other's eyes. We should not dismiss patience's value because of this more secular perspective because it has definite, overlapping spiritual value as well.

It is interesting that Solomon connects impatience to pride. He observes that the impatient haughtily seize on something before its conclusion is worked out, while the patient see a thing to its end and are rewarded. Does this principle not apply to God working with us?

[Proverbs 14:29](#) holds a similar thought: "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." Patience grows from a combination of [faith](#), [hope](#), love, and self-control. As these two proverbs and many more reveal, we should cultivate patience because it shows understanding and because it is wise. Wisdom produces success, and being successful in glorifying God is what life is all about.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience](#)

Related Topics: [Patience](#) | [Pride](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Slow to Wrath](#)

[Ecclesiastes 12:8-13](#)

Verse 8 reminds the reader where Solomon's treatise began. A person's life will end in vanity if he does not take advantage of the life of [faith](#) that [God](#) has given to him. His life will simply end in meaninglessness.

Solomon advises us to fear God and keep His commandments. He is saying to eat and drink joyfully, but to do it in balance. We should never lose control of ourselves. We need to work with purpose and do it diligently. It is best to enjoy our marriage with our mate. We are to seek wisdom and use it.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Ecclesiastes and the Feast of Tabernacles \(Part 2\)](#)

Related Topics: [Diligence](#) | [Ecclesiastes and the Feast of Tabernacles](#) | [Ecclesiastes as a Treatise on Life](#) | [Enjoying Life](#) | [Meaninglessness](#) | [Seeking Wisdom](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Control, Lack of](#) | [Using Wisdom](#) | [Vanity](#) | [Vanity of Physical life](#)



[Isaiah 47:8-9](#)

Self-indulgence promotes, among other things, attitudes of fanaticism, false security, presumption, and fun-seeking. Fanaticism is unbridled obsession, and though most do not recognize it as form of self-indulgence, it is a gratification of selfish desire. The apostle Paul says that we should avoid those who are driven by lust and greed and have no self-control.

Martin G. Collins

[Overcoming \(Part 8\): Self-Indulgence](#)

Related Topics: [False Security](#) | [Greed](#) | [Lust](#) | [Presumption](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Gratification](#) | [Self Indulgence](#) | [Selfish Desire](#) | [Selfishness](#)

[Isaiah 53:4-9](#)

[Jesus](#) shows us that [meekness](#) is not a mere contemplative virtue; it is maintaining [peace](#) and [patience](#) in the midst of pelting provocations. In II Corinthians Paul realizes that the meek and gentle approach can easily appear as weakness to those unfamiliar with Jesus' example, so he calls it "the meekness . . . of Christ." True meekness is always measured by Christ's meekness. His humility, patience, and total submission of His own will to the will of the Father exemplifies meekness.

Martin G. Collins

[Meekness](#)

Related Topics: [Christ's Meekness](#) | [Humility](#) | [Meekness](#) | [Meekness of Christ](#) | [Patience](#) | [Peace](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Submission to God](#)

[Ezekiel 11:19-20](#)

Self-control is the manifestation of God's work in man through the Holy Spirit. Paul elaborated in His teaching on self-control that Christian self-control results from the Holy Spirit's indwelling ([Romans 8:1-4](#)). It is the Spirit-controlled mind that is strengthened with power ([Ephesians 3:16; 5:18](#)) to control rebellious desires and to resist the allurements of tempting pleasures.

Martin G. Collins

[Self-Control](#)



Related Topics: [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [God's Holy Spirit](#) | [God's Spirit, Manifestation of](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit "in" us](#) | [Indwelling of the Holy Spirit](#) | [Self Control](#)

[Daniel 8:5-7](#)

God's description of Greece, their army and the manner in which they fought is instructive. Greece's army was invincible in its time. Nobody ever fought with the lightning ferocity and cunning of Greece before this time or perhaps since. They created "blitzkrieg" warfare, which Adolph Hitler openly admitted that he copied from the ancient Greeks.

One historian speculated that the ferocity of the Greek army was produced by their approach to life and especially politics. Even though the Greek system had people filling governing offices such as mayor or burgess, they did not have a representative system like ours. Their society was close to a pure democracy. Each Greek male was taught that *he* was responsible to participate and contribute to the governing of the community. One result of this was that individual citizens felt responsible to the community, and leadership qualities were produced in them that made each Greek male feel as though he was the leader of his community even though he really was not.

These qualities carried through into their warfare. The individual soldier not only took orders from his captain, he also thought independently to act for the benefit of the regiment. This frequently became necessary in the heat of battle when the leader was incapacitated by wounds or other distractions. Another quickly assumed his role, and there was no loss of leadership.

Thus, a factor that made the Greek fighting machine so invincible was that when their "shepherd" was smitten, the "sheep" did not scatter. The individual Greek soldier would not run off to protect himself from the confusion and danger of the battle when his commander fell. Instead, he helped his unit regroup because he was responsibly committed to its well-being and the accomplishment of its goals rather than his personal well-being.

There are times when it is necessary to flee or withdraw for a while. [Jesus](#) said to flee persecution ([Matthew 10:23](#)). It is obvious that, on occasion, discretion is the better part of valor. But such times should be only a brief interval during the time of God's working with a person or with His church.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[In the Grip of Distrust](#)

Related Topics: [Commitment](#) | [Government](#) | [Responsibility, Sense of](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Sacrifice](#)



[Matthew 5:9](#)

Most of us are not at all adept at reconciling warring parties, but that is not the kind of peacemaking [Jesus](#) is concerned about for us now. His idea of peacemaking revolves around the way we live. It was Adam and Eve's *conduct* that shattered the [peace](#) between man and [God](#). Cain's *conduct* broke the peace between him and Abel and him and God. As it is with all of us, conduct makes or breaks the peace!

As mentioned earlier, Paul commands us, "As much *as depends on you*, live peaceably with all men" ([Romans 12:18](#)), an arduous task at times, considering human personalities. The thrust of Paul's exhortation implies that, far from being a simple task, complying with it will call upon our constant vigilance, self-control, and earnest prayer.

Though human nature guarantees that peace-breaking "[offenses](#) must come," it is part of Christian duty to ensure that our conduct produces no just cause of complaint against us ([Matthew 18:7](#)). It is first for our own peace that we do so, for it is impossible to be happy while involved in arguments and warfare. Some Christians are more competitive and contentious than others, and they need to beg God doubly for the spiritual strength to restrain their pride and anger and to calm them. Paul warns, "'Be angry, and do not [sin](#)': do not let the sun go down on your wrath" ([Ephesians 4:26](#)). Though pride may be at the base of contention, rising anger within one or the other person in a dispute is frequently the first sign that the peace is about to be broken. Paul's warning is necessary because anger is so difficult to check and equally difficult to let go completely before the peace is broken, and bitter and persistent hatred soon replaces the anger.

Paul quotes the first phrase of this verse from [Psalm 4:4](#), then modifies the second phrase to give it a more immediate and practical application. "Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord" ([Psalm 4:4-5](#)). This is exactly the course Jesus follows when taunted and vilified by those whose ire He had aroused. Notice Peter's testimony:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. ([I Peter 2:21-23](#))

If we follow Christ's example, the one reviling or threatening soon finds himself without an opponent. God, then, advises us to be passive in the face of contention. In the Kingdom, however, we will likely be a great deal more proactive, just as Christ is now as our High Priest. He will be



even more active when He comes as [King of kings](#) to fight against the nations and establish His peace.

Since it is true that "blessed are the [peacemakers](#)," it logically follows that God curses peace-breakers, a fact all who desire to be peacemakers must keep in mind. Contention produces the curse of disunity. When Adam and Eve sinned, both unity and peace were shattered, and God sentenced them to death. Regardless of the justification, it is impossible for sin to produce either godly peace or unity. It is therefore urgent that we be diligent not merely to guard against the more obvious forms of sin but also bigotry, intemperate zeal, judging, impatience, and a quarrelsome spirit, which provide a basis for Paul's counsel in [Romans 14:19](#).

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Beatitudes, Part 7: Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#)

Related Topics: [Conduct](#) | [Contention](#) | [Disunity](#) | [Peace](#) | [Peacemaker](#) | [Peacemaking](#) | [Reconciliation](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Unity](#)

[Matthew 7:13-14](#)

Never let anybody convince you that Christianity is not a religion of works. Christianity is *hard* work! That is what our Savior says. It is difficult! It is hard work because its direction and purpose run counter to human nature.

Confusion about "works" enters the picture when people wrongly try to associate "works" with "salvation." We are saved by grace through [faith](#) ([Ephesians 2:8](#))—there is no argument with this biblical fact. Works enter the picture as a necessary part of the process of *growth* within God's purpose—not salvation. Salvation is, in a major sense, an already finished work of [Jesus Christ](#), which is why so many biblical statements about salvation are written in the past tense.

However, laziness plays a large part in why we do not grow. [God](#) expects us to work, though we will not earn salvation by it. We grow *because* of work, by overcoming problems. If we are too lazy to work at overcoming things, though we may be in God's Kingdom, we are not going to reap the rewards God's promises to overcomers.

God is looking for His children to grow. Every parent wants his child to become a mature adult who is able to take his place in society, to live independent of the family yet still be connected to it in a loving way, to stand on his own feet. God sets the pattern, and He wants His children to grow as free and independent moral agents. However, we are not that way when He finds, calls, reveals Himself and His way to us, and leads us to [repentance](#). He wants us to grow into what He is:



And God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ([Genesis 1:26](#))

God gives everybody who reads His Book an early indication that work will play a major role in what He has created. Dominion! That is "rulership" or maybe a better word would be "management." And dominion over or management of our own personal environment requires *work*.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Love's Greatest Challenges](#)

Related Topics: [Dominion](#) | [Hard Work](#) | [Image and Likeness of God](#) | [Laziness](#) | [Love's Greatest Challenges](#) | [Overcoming](#) | [Overcoming and Works](#) | [Process of Growth](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Spiritual Maturity](#) | [Spiritual Maturity, Process of](#) | [We are Made in God's Image and Likeness](#) | [Work](#) | [Works](#)

[Matthew 11:18-19](#)

What are the children of wisdom? Good works and good fruit. Whether what we do is wise or foolish is seen in the fruit we bear and in what we accomplish. An alcoholic produces sorrow for himself and his family, battered wives and children, poor health, and a shorter life. A glutton produces a bad example for his family and his brethren, poverty, poor health, and eventually death. We must control our desires because excess desire is the driving force behind gluttony. When we lose control of it, we [sin](#), feeding the [god](#) that is in our belly, the god of excess, the god of too much, too fast, too eagerly.

Another interpretation of "wisdom is justified by her children" is that those who follow the wisdom from above recognize and live their lives based on truth. By their example in living wisely and righteously, they justify, prove, that it is the right and reasonable way to live. The way the wise live destroys the credibility of false accusations. Avoiding gluttony is one way to show that we are living in wisdom. The foolish—the opposite of the wise—tend toward gluttony.

Martin G. Collins

[Gluttony: Sin of Lust and Greed \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Alcohol Abuse](#) | [Alcoholism](#) | [Belly as god](#) | [Desire](#) | [Desire as a Bridgehead to Sin](#) | [Excess Desire](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sin of Gluttony](#)



[Matthew 16:24-25](#)

[Jesus](#) tells us to *deny ourselves*. This means we must disown and renounce ourselves and subjugate everything—all our works, interests, and enjoyments—to the standards set by [God](#). Paul commands us to bring under our control every thought that opposes God and His way ([II Corinthians 10:5](#)).

Jesus also instructs us to *bear our cross*. We need to embrace the situations God has set us in, and with [faith](#) in Him to bring us through them, bear the troubles and difficulties that come upon us. Just as Jesus accepted His role, even to "the death of the cross" ([Philippians 2:8](#)), we need to be content with what God gives us to do ([Philippians 4:11](#)). As Paul says in [I Timothy 6:6](#), "Godliness with contentment is great gain." What an achievement it is not to be driven by evil hungers!

God has called us to lay down our lives in subjection to Him. The supreme object of our lives is not our personal happiness or fulfilling our every desire. Our goal is God's kingdom and His righteousness ([Matthew 6:33](#)), but notice what Jesus says next: "And all these things shall be added to you." If we yield ourselves to God's instruction and grow and overcome, He will fulfill our legitimate desires!

[Matthew 16:25](#) shows us the two sides of this issue. Jesus says that if we insist on preserving our way of life, with all its wrong hungers and desires, we will lose it eternally! But if we take control of our mind and emotions and destroy our way of life—ridding ourselves of all the wrong hungers and desires that are against God—then God will save it eternally! The better option is obvious.

[Satan](#) has filled [this world](#) with hungers of every sort to tempt men, including the people of God. Hungers of lust, power, money, and fame seem inviting after the monotony of day-to-day living, but Satan's way is a trap, though an enticing one. It always looks good on the outside, but inside is [sin](#), destruction, and ultimately death, eternal death.

God allows us to make decisions. He allows us to learn from the decisions we make—both right and wrong. The right decision to make about the wonderful calling and opportunity He has given to us is to yield ourselves under the mighty hand of God in faith that He will work in us. His work is always wonderful and good. Once we yield, we can set our mind to overcome, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And God will satisfy us!

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

[Do You Have 'the Hunger'?](#)

Related Topics: [Abstain from Evil](#) | [Abstinence](#) | [Bearing Our Cross](#) | [Bringing Thoughts into Captivity](#) | [Hungering for Righteousness](#) | [Lust](#) | [Satan's Traps](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Spiritual Hunger](#) | [Spiritual Thirst](#) | [Temptation](#)

[Matthew 24:45-51](#)

The parable of the faithful and evil servants admonishes us to be faithful and wise in carrying out responsibilities and relationships with our fellow servants, our brothers in the body of [Christ](#).

A faithful person is trustworthy, scrupulous, honest, upright, and truthful. Without specifically stating it, Christ is saying that we have to be keeping the first of the two great commandments: "You shall love the Lord your [God](#) with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" ([Matthew 22:37](#)).

In this context "wise" means judicious, prudent, sensible, showing sound judgment. It suggests an understanding of people and situations, showing unusual discernment and judgment in dealing with them. Just as Paul writes in [I Thessalonians 5:6](#) about being self-controlled, Christ's use of "wise" indicates an exercising of restraint, using sound, practical wisdom and discretion, and acting in good sense and godly rationality. In short, Christ means exercising love. He tells us that we should be faithful in keeping the second of the two great commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

Since this parable applies to everyone, Christ admonishes us to lead in a way that unites and inspires others to be faithful. We do this by giving them the truth, a good example, and encouragement. In this way, we become wise and faithful stewards of the trust God has given us.

In these verses, Christ strongly links belief with behavior in both examples. If we believe in His return, we will not live as we would like carnally. It is as simple as that. If we really believe He will return soon, this parable shows that our belief will regulate our lives, keeping us from extremes of conduct.

This faithful attitude is opposed to that of the scornful servant, who says his master delays His coming and beats his fellows. His conduct turns for the worse as he eats and drinks with the drunkards. From the description Christ provides, the evil servant's attitude is arrogant, violent, self-indulgent, gluttonous, and hypocritical. Because he believes he has plenty of time to square his relationship with God, his conduct becomes evil.

In summary, *whoever is entrusted with duties must perform them faithfully, prepared at all times to account for what he has done. The key words in this parable are faithful, wise, and ready.*

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism](#)



Related Topics: [Faith](#) | [Faithfulness](#) | [Jesus Christ's Return](#) | [Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants](#) | [Preparedness](#) | [Readiness](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Relationships](#) | [Self Centeredness](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Time](#) | [Time Management](#)

[Matthew 25:1-13](#)

The [Parable of the Ten Virgins](#) pictures the church waiting for the Bridegroom's return. Because of an unexpectedly long delay, He finds half the virgins unprepared when He finally arrives.

In weddings of that time, the bridegroom traditionally led a procession of bridesmaids from where they waited to his home. Since the procession almost invariably took place at night, each bridesmaid was expected to supply her own torch or lamp. If the bridegroom came later than expected, the bridesmaid needed to be prepared with extra torches or oil for her lamp.

The difference between the wise and the foolish virgins in the parable is not that one group did not have oil, but that one group did not have *enough* for the unexpectedly long delay. When the cry went out, their lamps were still burning, but they were sputtering and going out. Oil, of course, represents God's Holy Spirit. The wise virgins, like the faithful and wise servant of [Matthew 24:45-51](#), are prepared. They make sure that they remain in contact with the dispenser of oil, as is implied when they say to the foolish virgins, "No, . . . go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (verse 9). The wise had been in recent contact with the dispenser of oil, whereas the others apparently had dallied around. Going frequently to the dispenser, the wise, when the bridegroom arrived, had an adequate supply to trim their lamps and go into the marriage supper. *The lesson is preparedness through vision and foresight.*

Because it is an internal state, preparedness cannot be transferred. That is evident in the reaction of the virgins. It is a matter of the heart, an intangible that accrues by spending long periods of time under many circumstances with the Dispenser of the Holy Spirit. What cannot be transferred to those who are unprepared are matters of attitude, character, skill, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. They are personal attributes that are built and honed over months and years.

When one needs a skill immediately, how much time does it take to learn it? If a man suddenly needed the skill to repair an automobile, and he had never done any work on one, he may as well have no hands at all! It works the same way with spiritual attributes. Preparing for eventualities is the lesson of this parable. The wise virgins prepared for the eventuality that it might take longer for the bridegroom to come—they showed foresight and vision, and they entered the wedding feast. The others did not.

The oil cannot be borrowed either. In no way can it be passed from one person to another. We cannot borrow character or a relationship with [God](#). The parable teaches us that opportunity comes,



opportunity knocks, and then opportunity leaves. The foolish failed to face the possibility that the bridegroom would come later than expected, and when they were awakened, they had no time to fetch any oil and fill their lamps.

No one can deliver his brother. Each person determines his own destiny. No matter how close we are, even if we are one in flesh as in marriage, a husband cannot deliver his wife, and a wife cannot deliver her husband. Nor can we deliver our children. Everyone stands on his own in his relationship with God. God makes this clear in [Ezekiel 14:14](#): "'Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,' says the Lord God." Though it is a hard lesson, it should motivate us to discipline ourselves, to exercise self-control, to be alert, and to give our attention to our spiritual priorities. Thus, each person determines his own destiny.

Equating the foolish virgins with their modern counterparts, the [Laodiceans](#), their [faith](#) is perfunctory. Their church membership is routine, merely going through the motions. They have enough faith that they at least show up for church services. They have beliefs and character and motivation—but not enough!

The Bridegroom's refusal to admit the five foolish virgins (verse 12) must not be construed as a callous rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the Kingdom. Far from callous, Christ's rejection is entirely justified because these people never make preparations for their marriage to Him. In the analogy, though they realize they have met their future mate and admire Him, they never develop the relationship. In a sense, they have already rejected Him. Thus, an additional lesson in this parable is that *our relationship with God must be worked on continually*.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism](#)

Related Topics: [Church, The](#) | [Faith](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Jesus Christ's Return](#) | [Laodiceanism](#) | [Oil as Metaphor](#) | [Oil as Symbol](#) | [Parable of the Ten Virgins](#) | [Preparedness](#) | [Priorities](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Righteousness](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Time](#) | [Time Management](#) | [Vision](#)

[Mark 8:31-34](#)

[Jesus](#) teaches self-denial to His disciples not only with His words but also by His actions. Notice that His call to self-denial comes immediately after predicting His own sacrificial death. He is the supreme model of the self-denial to which He calls others. He even denies Himself any urge to avenge Himself or to threaten His persecutors for what they had done to Him. In Jesus' example, we see that, by committing ourselves to [God](#) who judges rightly, we deny ourselves the temptation of worldly lusts.



Martin G. Collins

[Overcoming \(Part 5\): Self-Denial](#)

Related Topics: [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Sacrifice](#) | [Yielding to God](#) | [Yielding to God's Will](#)

Luke 16:10-13

[Jesus Christ](#) does not need to see us in action administering a great city to know how we will govern in His Kingdom. He can see how we solve our problems in our own little life, whether we humble ourselves to be faithful by submitting to His way. Or do we "solve" our relationship problems with others by shouting, punching, hating, crawling into a shell, refusing to fellowship, going on strike, spreading [gossip](#), seeking others to take our side, or running down another's reputation?

He can tell by the way we manage our own or our company's money; how we maintain our property; and how we dress. Christ can even judge our abilities by how we drive our car! Some people turn into aggressive, lead-footed monsters behind the wheel. Are we so vain to think the road belongs to us? Would He entrust a city to such an obnoxious person?

A woman once asked Mr. Armstrong what she had to do to [worship God](#) and prepare for the Kingdom. Who knows what she expected, but he advised her to begin in her bedroom! No one knows whether he meant that she should work on her prayers, keep the room neat and clean, or improve her relationship with her husband—maybe all three. The principle is that preparation for the Kingdom is achieved by working on the little things of life God's way.

[Matthew 25:21](#) illustrates this clearly. "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the [joy](#) of your lord.'" In this parable, the servant who misused his position was disqualified because the lord could not trust him to use what was given him in a godly way.

Can we see this, brethren? ***The very elements involved in the process of sanctification are the ones that prepare and qualify us to rule!***

What kind of decisions do we make in the everyday things of life? The choices required to live God's way are really very simple. Basically, they are a matter of saying, "Yes" or "No" to [God's law](#). It does not have to be complicated for [God](#) to judge where we stand. He did not give Adam and Eve some long, complex mathematical, engineering, or political test. It was a simple test of obedience involving one of the most basic areas of life—food. You can eat this but not that.



We do not have to be an Adolf Hitler to prove ourselves unsuitable to rule over others. How we treat our spouse, children, or friends will provide ample evidence. Do we carefully think through what we say? Do we keep our word? Are we short-tempered, hard to get along with, stubborn, and uncooperative unless things are done our way? Are we quick to judge, impatient, malicious, foul-mouthed, or rebellious? Do we seek preferential treatment or position?

Christ needs to know if we will live His way now, before He entrusts us with the power of office in His Kingdom. The leaders of [this world](#) are not interested in the Way (see [Acts 9:2](#); [16:17](#); [18:25-26](#); [19:9](#)). They consider it foolish, unrealistic, impractical, and simplistic. So they make treaties and break them, and the wonderful advances of technology continue to prove useless in things that matter. The [Kingdom of God](#), however, will produce all the good things written in the prophecies because the government itself reflects them. They are in its character, and they have already manifested themselves in each ruler's life.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Preparing to Rule!](#)

Related Topics: [Decisions](#) | [Faithfulness](#) | [Faithfulness in Little Things](#) | [Preparation for Rulership](#) | [Relationships](#) | [Relationships With People](#) | [Rulership, Preparation for](#) | [Sanctification](#) | [Self Control](#)

[Romans 5:1](#)

Here, [peace](#) undoubtedly means a cessation of hostilities, a tranquillity of mind, where formerly a state of almost continual agitation had existed because of the carnal mind's innate hostility toward [God](#) and His law. These last several verses take note of the horrible contention and enmity that [sin](#) causes, for where there is no strife, there is no need for a [peacemaker](#). All of us, however, were at war with God; [Titus 3:3](#) catches all of us within its scope: "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Before conversion, we each needed a peacemaker to mediate and make reconciliation for us.

What is missing from verses like [Titus 3:3](#) is that they do not show how tenaciously human nature clings to our attitudes and behavior, providing a constant challenge to maintaining peace with God and others. Paul vividly describes his battle with it in Roman 7, and numerous other exhortations encourage us to employ self-control and love for God and the brethren. This leads us to understand that peacemaking involves more than mediating between disputing parties. Peacemaking is a constant responsibility. Its achievement is possible but more difficult than it first seems because many factors - both from within and without - challenge us in maintaining it.



John W. Ritenbaugh[The Beatitudes, Part 7: Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#)

Related Topics: [Mediation](#) | [Mediator](#) | [Mediator, Christ as](#) | [Peace](#) | [Peace Maker](#) | [Peace Making](#) | [Peace of God](#) | [Peace Of Mind](#) | [Peace with God](#) | [Peace, Pursuing](#) | [Peacemaker](#) | [Peacemaking](#) | [Reconciliation](#) | [Reconciliation with God](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Tranquility](#)

[Romans 12:1-2](#)

Paul's exhortation is especially interesting in light of what precedes it. Chapter 11 concludes a lengthy dissertation on the doctrinal foundation of Christianity, showing the central importance of [faith](#) and grace. Instruction in the practical aspect of Christianity begins with chapter 12. The two sections are linked by the word "therefore." By this, Paul demonstrates that Christian living is inseparably bound to Christian belief. Faith without works is dead, and works without the correct belief system is vanity. Wrong thinking cannot lead to right doing.

If a person drinks in the spirit of Paul's doctrinal teaching in the first eleven chapters, he will present his body a living sacrifice and renew the spirit of his mind. Thus, outwardly and inwardly he will be on his way toward God's ideal for human conduct. All the virtues produced from this change will begin to grow and manifest themselves in his life. Self-surrender and its companion, self-control, are inseparable parts of this command.

Paul uses the metaphor of sacrifice throughout verse 1 to reinforce both similarities with and contrasts between Israel's Old Covenant sacrificial system and the Christian's sacrifice of His life in service to [God](#). "Present" is a technical expression from the sacrificial terminology. Under the Old Covenant, the offerer's gift was presented to God and became His property. Similarly, the gift of our life is set apart for God's use as He determines. When we are bought with a price, we belong to ourselves no longer.

The Old Covenant sacrifices produced a sweet smell that God declares in [Leviticus 1:17](#); [2:2](#); and [3:5](#) to be a fragrant aroma in His nostrils. In the same way, the gift of our life is "acceptable to God." Then Paul says that giving our lives in this way is "reasonable," that is, of sound judgment, moderate, sensible, or as many modern translations say, rational or spiritual. The outward acts of a son of God spring logically from what has changed in the inner man. His mind is being renewed, and he is thus controlling himself to live according to [God's will](#) rather than in conformity to the insanity of [this world](#).

The last word in verse 1, "service," is as important as any, for within this context it describes the service, not of a domestic slave, but of a priest in complete self-surrender performing his duties



before God's altar ([I Peter 2:5](#)). It means that we must, first of all, be priests by our inward consecration and then we must lay our outward life on the altar in God's service. This is what our works accomplish.

Almost from the beginning of the Bible, sacrifice is one of the great keywords of God's way. God clearly alludes to Christ's sacrifice in Genesis 3, and the first sacrifices occur in Genesis 4. The principle of sacrifice is then woven into the fabric of virtually every book until beginning with Christ, the Founder of Christianity, it becomes perhaps the master-word for the outward life of His followers.

Sacrifices are inherently costly to the giver, or there is no real sacrifice in the offering. David explains in [II Samuel 24:24](#), "Then the king said to Araunah, 'No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.'" [Jesus](#) amplifies this principle with a statement of far reaching day-to-day consequences: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" ([John 15:13](#)). What could be more costly than a person giving his life in service by living a way of the very highest of standards that his mind and body do not by nature and habit want to live? It requires a decision that will from time to time bring intense pressure upon him to control himself against strong drives to go in an entirely different direction. But he must control himself if he is to work in the service of God.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Faith](#) | [Grace](#) | [Living Sacrifice](#) | [Old Covenant Sacrifices](#) | [Sacrifice](#) | [Sacrifice as Metaphor](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Sacrifice](#) | [Self Surrender](#) | [Service](#)

[Romans 12:18-21](#)

Self-restraint and obedience to [God's law](#) is realized in outgoing concern for others that exceeds and rules over our own self-interest. Even lawful acts may on occasion cause other brethren to stumble or be made weak. Self-control provides the ability to resist what may cause pain to others. Thus, we exercise self-control for others, as well as for ourselves.

Martin G. Collins

[Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Obedience](#) | [Outgoing Concern](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Restraint](#)



[Romans 14:20-21](#)

If we are gluttonous and encourage or cause others who are weak to be gluttonous, part of the responsibility of their [sin](#) rests on us. This puts a great amount of pressure on us to be our brother's keeper, looking after his welfare without judging him.

Martin G. Collins

[Gluttony: A Lack of Self-Control \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Encouraging Others to Sin](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [Inducing Others to Sin](#) | [Lack of Self Control](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Control, Lack of](#)

[Romans 14:22-23](#)

If we doubt that we are eating as a Christian should, which includes both the quantity and the quality of the food, then it is not of [faith](#). Therefore it is [sin](#).

Martin G. Collins

[Gluttony: A Lack of Self-Control \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Eating](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [Moderation](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sin of Gluttony](#) | [Temperance](#)

[1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)

Suppose you lived during the time that the Temple in Jerusalem was in operation. As a faithful Levite, you were given [stewardship](#) to maintain the Temple and its grounds. How would you take care of that responsibility, knowing it was God's earthly dwelling place? Would you approach it in an irreverent, slap-dash, careless, lackadaisical, "I am too busy with other things" manner? Or would you be highly respectful and orderly and do whatever your hand found to do with all your might?

Spiritually, [God](#) has already given us this responsibility. In fact, it is a double-edged responsibility, both personal and corporate. In [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#), Paul uses "temple" as a synonym for "church," referring to the whole body of believers. This is clearly an extension of his earlier use of the building metaphor. By it, he illustrates that each person, as part of the building, has some effect on the quality of the whole building by how he conducts his life. This metaphor ties all of us together as a team with the specific responsibility of doing all we can to build up and strengthen the church. Undoubtedly, the ministry bears the greater burden, but every member is involved.



Paul begins in verse 6 by giving himself and Apollos as examples. The King James Version makes the first part of verse 8 unclear: "Now he who plants [Paul] and he who waters [Apollos] are one." The Revised Standard Version clarifies this: "He who plants and he who waters are equal." They are not one as if they are identical or bound together like a set of Siamese twins. He means that they are equally important to the result.

Paul frequently emphasizes the team aspect. He writes in verse 9, "We are God's fellow workers." In verses 10-15, 17, he refers to "each one" and "anyone" frequently. No one has any room to think that it does not matter what he or she does or fails to do to make the body spiritually healthy. A great, dominant theme of Paul's teaching is the individual's personal responsibility for his life and that—somehow, somewhere, sometime—each will have to give account to God for what he has done.

How can Paul say the various parts of the body bear equal responsibility? This thought hearkens back to the [Parable of the Talents](#). The master does not expect his three servants to produce the same quantity, but he expects each to be equally faithful in what he entrusted to their stewardship.

In verse 17, Paul uses "destroy" twice (see margin). It is a strong warning to those committing the sins named in other parts of the epistle—advocating false doctrine, strife, jealousy, sexual immorality, and other permissive compromises—that God would hold them responsible despite how matters appeared at the time. He would destroy them because the church is holy because it belongs to God, and He has separated it from [the world](#). Through their false doctrines or sinful conduct, whether they were aware or not, they were seeking or being used to destroy the spiritual health of the church. Each member bears responsibility for keeping himself holy and therefore spiritually healthy.

To understand this, perhaps we need nothing more than a deeper awareness that, despite the way things may presently look on the surface, our worldview—how we look at life and all its jumble of events—is quite narrow compared to God's. Once we see things from His perspective, we can see we bear a major responsibility to the body of [Christ](#) because God has included us in His great purpose.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Eating: How Good It Is! \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Body Analogy](#) | [Body as Temple of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Body Metaphor](#) | [Levites](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sexual Immorality](#) | [Spiritual Health](#) | [Stewardship](#) | [Temple of God's Holy Spirit](#)



[1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#)

Paul uses runners in the Greek games as examples of how we are to live as Christians. The first thing to notice is the utmost tension, energy, and strenuous effort pictured by athletes straining for the finish line in [hope](#) of the glory of winning. "This is the way to run," says Paul, "if we want to attain our potential."

This requires steady, intense concentration or focus of the runners. They cannot afford to become distracted by things off to the side of their course. If they do, their effectiveness in running will surely diminish. Keeping focused requires control—not allowing distractions to interfere with the responsibility at hand. "Seek first the [kingdom of God](#) and His righteousness," says Jesus ([Matthew 6:33](#)). Here, the issue is single-mindedness. James writes, "[H]e who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. . . . [H]e is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" ([James 1:6](#), 8). Controlling our focus can go a long way toward making the run successful.

Paul then says the victorious runner sets Christians an example of rigid self-control: "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in **all** things." It is not only a matter of concentrating while he is racing, but in all areas of life because his whole life impacts on the race. The runner religiously follows a rigorous program within a rigid schedule each day: He rises at a certain hour, eats a breakfast of certain foods, fills his morning with exercises, and works on his technique. After a planned lunch, he continues training, eats a third planned meal, and goes to bed at a specified hour. Throughout, he not only avoids sensuous indulgences, he must also abstain from many perfectly legitimate things that simply do not fit into his program. An athlete who is serious about excelling in his chosen sport must live this way, or he will not succeed except against inferior competitors. He will suffer defeat by those who do follow them.

We can learn a great deal here about self-indulgence and self-control. It is not enough for us to say, "I draw the line there, at this or that vice, and I will have nothing to do with these." We will have a very difficult time growing under such an approach, as Paul shows in [Hebrews 12:1](#):

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside **every** weight, and the [sin](#) which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Many un sinful things are "weights" simply because they are so time- and mind-consuming. Because we do not want to fail in accomplishing the highest purposes for which we were called, we must run light to endure the length of our course successfully.



On the surface, being a Christian appears easy to do, in as much as a Christian is basically a man that trusts in [Jesus Christ](#). No one is more worthy of our trust, and He is fully able to bring us into the Kingdom of [God](#). But this is a mere surface observation. The truth is that being a Christian can be very difficult because the real Christian is one who, because he trusts Christ, must set his heel upon human nature within him and subordinate the appetites of his flesh and the desires of his mind to the aim of pleasing Him. No wishy-washy, irresolute, vacillating, lukewarm, disorderly, and unrestrained Christian will please his Master and glorify our Father.

Jesus says, "[N]arrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" ([Matthew 7:14](#)). Paul writes, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" ([II Timothy 2:3-4](#)). The Christian is exhorted to control himself and run to win.

In I Corinthians 9, Paul illustrates self-control in its positive aspects by showing what it produces along the way and—most importantly—in the end. Jesus makes it clear in Revelation 2 and 3 that the overcomers (conquerors, victors) will go into the Kingdom of God. Self-control plays a major role in bringing victory through our trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. Andrew MacLaren, a Protestant commentator, states, "There are few things more lacking in the average Christian life of today than resolute, conscious concentration upon an aim which is clearly and always before us." Self-control is not the only factor we need to do this, but it is a very necessary one. Its fruit, good beyond measure, is worth every effort and sacrifice we must make.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Athlete Analogy](#) | [Distraction](#) | [Overcoming](#) | [Running Analogy](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Discipline](#)

[1 Corinthians 9:27](#)

In the New Testament, the most common Greek word for self-control (temperance, KJV) is *enkrateia*. Its root meaning is "power over oneself" or "self-mastery." Self-control, in its widest sense, is mastery over our passions. It is the virtue that holds our appetites in check, controlling our rational will or regulating our conduct without being duly swayed by sensuous desires. Moderation is a key element in self-control.

Martin G. Collins

[Self-Control](#)



Related Topics: [Enkrateia](#) | [Moderation](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Temperance](#)

[2 Corinthians 3:15-17](#)

A carnal man cannot understand the law ([Romans 8:7](#)), for a veil keeps the meaning hidden. The converted man, however, has God's Spirit, the essence of the mind of [God](#). An effect of God's Spirit is that where it is present, there is liberty (verse 17). It is not coincidental that the [fruit of the Spirit](#) includes self-control ([Galatians 5:23](#)). Where the Holy Spirit is working, the people will be self-governing, and the leaders will be self-governing. Because everybody keeps a tight rein on himself and is being led by God's Spirit, there is no need for heavy-handedness—for strict external enforcement—nor for people to live in fear of the leaders. The leaders will be serving, the people will be working and growing, and liberty will flourish.

Liberty exists where God's Spirit is at work because the people have the time and the space to grow and develop character. They will not act out of fear or because they feel that they have to. Everyone must practice [forbearance](#) and [patience](#), as we allow God's other children the time and space to grow and develop character, just as they forbear with us as we grow and mature spiritually.

The controls, however, are *internal* rather than *external*. They will not be developed instantly because growth takes time. Proper judgment and discernment take a lifetime of personal experience with God to develop. Yet, when they are developed, they become permanent. They become *eternal*, which is what God is after.

It may seem like a risky proposition, and our Western nations are evidence that self-government without true internal controls cannot work. When people do not govern themselves, the human solution is a Nanny State. When the Nanny State falls apart—which it will—it typically ushers in either a Police State or occupation by a foreign power, which *will* impose order on those who will not govern themselves or provide for themselves when it is within their power.

But it need not be so for the church of God. If we have the Holy Spirit, we have the means to control ourselves and thus be free. This does not mean that external control will never be imposed upon us. The lives of [Jesus](#) and the apostles demonstrate that they were subject to governing authorities who exercised lordship over them. Yet, heavy-handed external control is not necessary when the Holy Spirit is working in the leadership and the people. That is what matters in God's purpose in bringing many sons to the same glory and liberty that He has.



David C. Grabbe[The Nanny Church \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Developing Godly Character](#) | [Discernment, Growing in](#) | [Extrinsic Motivation](#) | [God's Spirit as the Mind of God](#) | [Intrinsic Motivation](#) | [Liberty in Law](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Spiritual Maturity](#)

[2 Corinthians 10:5](#)

We are to come to have the very mind of [Jesus Christ](#), bringing absolutely every thought into captivity or control. This is the highest form of mind control—where [God](#) expects us to control our own minds.

Martin G. Collins[Basic Doctrines: Repentance](#)

Related Topics: [Bringing Thoughts into Captivity](#) | [Mind of Christ](#) | [Mind of God](#) | [Self Control](#)

[Galatians 5:17](#)

Sometimes we seem to consist of a whole clamorous mob of desires, like week-old kittens, blind of eye with mouths wide open, mewling to be satisfied. It is as if two voices are in us, arguing, "You shall, you shall not. You ought, you ought not." Does not [God](#) want us to set a will above these appetites that cannot be bribed, a reason that cannot be deceived, and a conscience that will be true to God and His standards? We must either control ourselves using the courage, power, and love of God's Spirit, or we will fall to pieces.

Adam and Eve established the pattern for mankind in the Garden of Eden. All of us have followed it, and then, conscience-smitten, we rankle under feelings of weakness. They were tempted by the subtle persuasions of [Satan](#) and the appeals of their own appetites for forbidden fruit that looked so good. To this they succumbed, and they sinned, bringing upon themselves the death penalty and much more evil besides. What is the use of appealing to men who cannot govern themselves, whose very disease is that they cannot, whose conscience cries out often both before and after they have done wrong, "Who shall deliver me from [this body of death](#)?" It is useless to tell a king whose subjects have overthrown him to rule his kingdom. His kingdom is in full revolt, and he has no soldiers behind him. He is a monarch with no power.



A certain Bishop Butler said, "If conscience had power, as it has authority, it would govern [the world](#)." Authority without power is nothing but vanity. Conscience has the authority to guide or accuse, but what good is it if the will is so enfeebled that the passions and desires get the bit between their teeth, trample the conscience, and gallop headlong to the inevitable collision with the ditch?

The solution to this lies in our relationship with Christ:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. ([Philippians 2:12-13](#))

This is the only thing that will give us complete self-control, and it will not fail.

In [Luke 11:13](#), Jesus makes this wonderful promise of strength to those who trust Him:

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Trust [Jesus Christ](#), and ask Him to govern. Ask Him for more of God's Holy Spirit, and He will help you to control yourself. Remember, [II Timothy 1:7](#) says this is a major reason that He gives us His Spirit. He will not fail in what He has promised because the request fits perfectly into God's purpose of creating sons in His image.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Carnal Mind](#) | [Carnal Nature](#) | [Conscience](#) | [Desire](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Pulls of the Flesh](#) | [Relationship with Christ](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Struggle against Carnal Nature](#)

[Galatians 5:22-24](#)

These qualities are aspects of God's character that we all need to have and use:

Love: Outgoing concern for others. True concern for all of mankind. Not being self-centered. Doing for others what is right, despite their character, appearance, social status, etc. (I Corinthians 13).



Joy: Related to happiness, only happiness requires right circumstances where joy does not. [Jesus Christ](#) felt joy though He faced heavy trials ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). We should all be joyful having been called by [God](#).

Peace: Peace of mind and peace with God ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)).

Longsuffering: Bearing with others who are working out their salvation. Being slow to anger ([Romans 15:1](#); [Luke 21:19](#)).

Kindness: Behaving toward others kindly, as God has behaved toward us ([Ephesians 4:31-32](#)).

Goodness: Generosity of spirit that springs from imitating Jesus Christ ([Psalm 33:4-5](#)).

Faithfulness: Being reliable. This describes a person who is trustworthy and will always stand up for God's way. We can count on, and should work at imitating, the faithfulness of God ([Philippians 1:6](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)).

Gentleness: Considerate and tactful in conduct and correction. Never angry at the wrong time ([Matthew 5:22-24](#); [Ephesians 4:26](#)).

Self-Control: Discipline which gives us victory over the wrong pulls of our mind and body ([I John 2:15-17](#)).

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

[Time for Self-Evaluation](#)

Related Topics: [Faith](#) | [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [Gentleness](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Joy](#) | [Kindness](#) | [Longsuffering](#) | [Love](#) | [Peace](#) | [Self Control](#)

[Galatians 5:22-23](#)

Paul names nine qualities. This divides neatly into three general groups, each consisting of three qualities. Of course, we can expect some overlapping of application between the groups, but generally the first group—love, [joy](#), and peace—portrays a Christian's mind in its most general aspect with special emphasis on one's relationship with [God](#). The second group—longsuffering ([patience](#)), [kindness](#), and goodness—contains social virtues relating to our thoughts and actions toward fellow man. The final group—faithfulness (fidelity), gentleness, and self-control—reveals how a Christian should be in himself with overtones of his spiritual and moral reliability.



Each of these virtues is a quality we should greatly desire, for without them, we cannot rightly reflect the mind and way of God. The [fruit of the Spirit](#) reflects the virtues God would manifest before mankind. Indeed, when [Jesus](#) became a man, it was by his life He glorified our Father in heaven. God, of course, is far more than this brief listing describes. But seeking first the [Kingdom of God](#) and His righteousness by yielding to His Word will produce these characteristics of God in us. Then, as we become like Christ, we will, like Him, glorify God.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit](#)

Related Topics: [Faithfulness](#) | [Fidelity](#) | [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [Gentleness](#) | [Joy](#) | [Kindness](#) | [Love](#) | [Peace](#) | [Reliability](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Social Virtues](#)

[Galatians 5:23](#)

In [Galatians 5:23](#), "self-control" (*temperance*, KJV) is the translation of the Greek word *enkrateia*, which means "possessing power, strong, having mastery or possession of, continent, self-controlled" (Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, "Galatians," p. 160). *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* adds that it means "holding in hand the passions and desires" (vol. IV, p. 168). The word thus refers to the mastery of one's desires and impulses, and does not in itself refer to the control of any specific desire or impulse. If a particular desire or impulse is meant, the context will indicate it.

Self-control is comprehensive in practical application to life, but the Bible does not use the word extensively. It is implied, however, in many exhortations to obedience, submission, and sinless living. The noun form is used only three times, the verb form twice ([I Corinthians 7:9](#); [9:25](#)), and the adjective form once ([Titus 1:8](#)). The negative form of the adjective is used three times. In [II Timothy 3:3](#), it is translated "without self-control [*incontinent*, KJV]"; in [Matthew 23:25](#), "self-indulgent [*excess*, KJV]"; and in [I Corinthians 7:5](#), "lack of self-control [*incontinency*, KJV]."

Another Greek word, *nephalios*, has the same general meaning, but it generally covers a more specific area of self-control. It is often translated as "temperate" or "sober." Even though its root condemns self-indulgence in all forms, the Bible's writers use it to refer to avoiding drunkenness.

Despite self-control's obvious importance, we should not limit our understanding of these words to merely the stringent discipline of the individual's passions and appetites. These words also include the notions of having good sense, sober wisdom, moderation, and soundness of mind as contrasted to insanity.



We see a good example of self-control implied in [Proverbs 25:28](#): "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." No specific Hebrew word in this sentence means "self-control," but "rule" certainly implies it. In its comments on this verse, the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states:

The picture is that of a city whose walls have been so nearly destroyed as to be without defense against an enemy; so is the man who has no restraint over his spirit, the source of man's passionate energies. He has no defense against anger, lust, and the other unbridled emotions that destroy the personality. (vol. 4, p. 267)

[Proverbs 16:32](#) shows a more positive side of self-control: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Here Solomon uses an entirely different word for "rule," but the sense of self-control remains. A comparison of the two proverbs reveals the great importance of self-control as both an offensive and defensive attribute.

Undoubtedly, self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-control are inextricably linked in Christian life; each is part of our duty to [God](#). Yet human nature exerts a persistent and sometimes very strong force away from God, as [Romans 8:7](#) clearly shows: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be." It is this force that each Christian must overcome. Controlling ourselves, denying human nature its impulse to satisfy its desire, and even sacrificing ourselves are necessary if we are to stop sinning as a way of life. When we add the concepts of self-denial and self-sacrifice to our understanding of self-control, we can see more easily how large a role self-control plays in the Bible.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Desire](#) | [Enkrateia](#) | [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Human Nature](#) | [Lust](#) | [Moderation](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Indulgence](#) | [Temperance](#)

[Galatians 5:23](#)

The [fruit of the Spirit](#) are listed in [Galatians 5:22-23](#). The last one Paul lists is self-control (NKJV) or temperance (KJV). A principle of interpretation we use when qualities like this are listed is that the most important comes first. However, *why* does Paul list them in this order? The list begins with "love" and ends with "self-control/temperance." Did Paul arrange this list in this order because it takes love to precipitate all the other characteristics, and if a person truly walks in the Spirit, the fruit will culminate in temperance?



Possibly, but understood this way, self-control is not the least of the fruit of the Spirit but a major goal. Most of the time, we do not [sin](#) because we are in ignorance, but because we simply will not make the sacrifice to control ourselves. Were Adam and Eve in ignorance when they sinned? Of course not! They sinned because they did not control themselves to obey what they knew. If this principle were not so, [God](#) could not hold the uncalled, the spiritual Gentiles of [this world](#), guilty based on natural law. Romans 2 makes it clear the uncalled know a great deal, but even with that knowledge, they still do not submit. Temperance is the fruit that, when applied to life, provides the right balance to glorify God.

Temperance, in modern English, usually refers only to restraint toward alcoholic beverages, but the biblical application is much broader. The Greek word, *engkrateia*, is the noun form of a verbal root that means "strong in a thing; strength; power; dominion; having power over; being master of." Its true biblical application, then, is synonymous with "self-mastery" or "self-control." Paul uses it this way in relation to the general demeanor of a bishop in [Titus 1:8](#): ". . . but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled." He applies it to sex in [I Corinthians 7:9](#): ". . . but if they cannot exercise self-control let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." In [I Corinthians 9:27](#), this word describes his discipline of his body in following this way of life.

Barnes' Notes on [Galatians 5:23](#), p. 388, comments:

It denotes the self-rule which a man has over the evil propensities of his nature. Our word temperance we use now in a much more limited sense, as referring mainly to abstinence from intoxicating drinks. But the word here used is employed in a much more extended signification. It includes the dominion over all evil propensities, and may denote continence, chastity, self-government, moderation in regard to all indulgences as well as abstinence from intoxicating drinks. . . . The sense here is, that the influences of the Holy Spirit on the heart make a man moderate in all indulgences; teach him to restrain his passions, and to govern himself; to control his evil propensities, and to subdue all inordinate affection. . . . A Christian must be a temperate man; and if the effect of his religion is not to produce this, it is false and vain. . . . Nothing does more scandal to religion than such indulgences; and, other things being equal, he is the most under the influence of the Spirit of God who is the most thoroughly a man of temperance.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Eating: How Good It Is! \(Part Six\)](#)



Related Topics: [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [Love](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Indulgence](#) | [Self Restraint](#) | [Temperance](#)

[Ephesians 6:1-3](#)

The command to honor parents applies to all of us all our lives. But here, as in [Colossians 3:20](#), children should obey their parents in all things "in the Lord."

The apostle is not saying a child must break the Ten Commandments if a parent orders him to so. Children should obey "in the Lord," that is, obey commands that agree with the will of [God](#). Most younger children cannot grasp whether a parental order conforms to [God's will](#). But as they age, they need to understand that they, too, are under the authority of the living [Christ](#).

Though parents have a huge part in starting children off on the right foot regarding this commandment, the greater responsibility for keeping it rests with the child. At some point, children need to realize that their submission to parents is an act of [faith](#) in Christ. Their required obedience is not based on any arbitrary power held by parents but on a higher law to which parents are also subject. Parents have a primary responsibility to teach their children to discipline, govern, or control *themselves* under [God's law](#). Children must learn that they cannot always do what they want when they want, or have what they want when they want it.

Keeping this commandment brings great benefits, as Paul reminds us in [Ephesians 6:2](#), "which is the first commandment with promise." The promise of blessing for keeping it is written right into the commandment! God promises, "That it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

This blessing has at least two parts. Obedience to parental admonitions, gained from years of experience living in this difficult and dangerous world, results in the building of knowledge, character, and habits of avoiding recklessness, lawlessness, violence, wrong companionships, and rebellion against authority. These often result in untimely and violent death at a young age. Virtually every year this comes to the fore when statistics show that accidents are our children's number one killer.

The second and ultimate meaning is that, in honoring our spiritual Father, God, we receive spiritual blessings far above long physical life. From the loving relationship between God and his child will arise eternal life, which God will give as a gift to a son who pleases Him.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fifth Commandment \(1997\)](#)



Related Topics: [Childrearing](#) | [Honor](#) | [Honoring Parents](#) | [Obedience](#) | [Obeying in the Lord](#) | [Parents](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Submission](#) | [Submission to God](#) | [The Fifth Commandment](#)

[Philippians 3:18-19](#)

Paul writes in [Philippians 3:18-19](#) that gluttons tend to concentrate on physical things, neglecting their spiritual relationship with [God](#).

We may think such idolatry is rare among us, but the apostle says there are "*many . . . whose god is their belly,*" their appetites, their physical senses. They break the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," because their desire becomes a higher priority than their Creator and Sustainer. Gluttony breaks the rest of the commandments as well:

The second, when we serve or relinquish control to our physical desires. [Colossians 3:5](#) says, "Therefore put to death your members which are on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and [covetousness](#), which is idolatry." We "bow down" to a false god when we gratify our lusts of the flesh and of the eyes ([I John 2:16](#)).

The third, when we fail to uphold God's name—and all that it represents—in glory and honor. Many call themselves Christians and claim to follow [Christ](#), but lack the holy character God wants us to have ([I Peter 2:5](#), 9). Is "Glutton" the name God wants His holy people to have? [I Peter 1:15](#) answers, "He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

The fourth, when we use the [Sabbath](#), a feast day, to crave and overeat. Sometimes we do this under the assumption that, since we are fellowshiping, we can eat excessive amounts. Eating or drinking too much is seeking our own pleasure, which [Isaiah 58:13-14](#) warns against in the context of the Sabbath:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD. . . .

The fifth, when we do not wisely use the many years of support and training we received from our parents. A child of any age who does not have self-control is a worry and an embarrassment to his parents. The glutton, abusing his body with excessive food, may not live even as long as his parents, fulfilling the inverse of the commandment's promise.



The sixth, by systematically and continually destroying the body and mind that God has given into our care. It is slow suicide. If parents are gluttons, they teach their children to do the same, thereby eventually killing them as well. Since our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit ([I Corinthians 6:19](#)), to destroy it knowingly is [sin](#).

The seventh, when we over-eat, over-buy, over-accumulate as a "get" way of life. Our way of life is our religion, and if it is a lifestyle of excessive desire, our religion is in competition with God's way of life. This, in effect, is spiritual [adultery](#), as seen in [Jeremiah 3:6-10](#). God says in verse 9, "So it came to pass, through [Judah's] casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees." These idols, worshipped on the high places, became the object of Judah's excessive desire, just as food, drink, or any material thing can be.

The eighth, when we take more than what is balanced and needful, thus more than God has given. In addition, by hoarding for ourselves we steal from others. Certainly, when there are people without enough, for us to consume more than we need is wrong ([Proverbs 22:9](#); [11:24-26](#)). A society that over-consumes at the expense of others is, at the very least, greedy. Wastefulness is a by-product of gluttony, and Americans no longer live by sayings like, "Waste not, want not!" We live in a careless, throw-away society, but the day will come when this gluttonous nation will lose everything and be taken into captivity. [Proverbs 23:21](#) predicts, "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty."

The ninth, when we are gluttonous while calling ourselves Christians. This is a lie and hypocritical, misrepresenting God. Commonly, gluttons blame a thyroid problem or claim it is a disease, thereby relinquishing responsibility. If this is not true, it is a lie. It is also a lie if we think that giving into excessive desire will not hurt us. God speaks of such self-deception in [Jeremiah 7:8-10](#):

Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations"?

The tenth, when we are not satisfied with what we have and desire the possessions of others. A glutton wants even more than he has. Children must be taught not to want the biggest piece of cake or the most ice cream. Solomon had one wife, then he wanted another and another and another until he had hundreds. Solomon was a glutton, which his power and wealth made easier.

As James says, if we break one commandment, we break them all ([James 2:10](#)). With gluttony, we can specifically break each one. It is not a trivial matter!



Martin G. Collins[Gluttony: A Lack of Self-Control \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Appetite, Control of](#) | [Belly as god](#) | [Control of Appetite](#) | [Desire](#) | [Get Way of Life](#) | [Gluttony](#) | [Idolatry](#) | [Lust](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#)

[1 Thessalonians 5:6](#)

The advice given to the Christian is to watch. While asleep, one cannot watch. The Greek word for "watch" can be better translated "alert," and the word for "sober" is more correctly "self-controlled." So Paul advises, "Let us be alert and self-controlled." In other words, while all of the distractions of [this world](#) spin dizzily around us, we have to be alert to their appeal and controlled enough to discipline ourselves to prioritize in the right way.

Though such a task is not easy, we must forcibly set our wills to pay attention to those eternal things that are more important. If we fail in this task, we may begin conducting our lives in darkness, and living in darkness leads eventually to spiritual blindness. It is vital to our spiritual health to remain alert and self-controlled!

John W. Ritenbaugh[The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism](#)

Related Topics: [Alertness](#) | [Neglect](#) | [Negligence](#) | [Priorities](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sober \(minded\)](#) | [Spiritual Blindness](#) | [Spiritual Neglect](#) | [Spiritual Slumber](#) | [Spiritual Stupor](#) | [Vigilance](#) | [Watching](#)

[1 Thessalonians 5:8](#)

Paul employs a military metaphor of a sentry on duty. He writes of "the breastplate of [faith](#) and love, and as a helmet the [hope](#) of salvation," soldiering gear. The alert and self-controlled sentry, vigilant for signs of the enemy, is entrusted with the safety of those within his camp. Normally, he is neither lackadaisical nor wildly excitable. His armor and weapons grant him a measure of control and ability when the need arises.

Similarly, a Christian should become neither lackadaisical nor wildly excited about the time of the end without the controlling factors of faith, hope, and love. There is nothing wrong with speculating about the time of [Christ's return](#). Speculating is a natural result of watching and evaluating the times. However, since even Christ did not know the time of His return, we would be very arrogant



to think that we might have had it revealed to us. In reality, if someone claims to know when Christ is coming, it is nothing short of blasphemy! That person is calling [God](#) a liar! [Jesus Christ](#) says nobody knows, not even the Son ([Mark 13:32](#)), and the implication is that the Father will not tell the Son until it is just about time for Him to return.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism](#)

Related Topics: [Armor Metaphor](#) | [Christ's Return](#) | [Jesus Christ's Return](#) | [Military Metaphor](#) | [Second Coming of Christ](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Soldier Metaphor](#) | [Speculating](#) | [Spiritual Armor](#) | [Watching](#)

[1 Thessalonians 5:15](#)

Two wrongs do not make a right, and in our irritated or angry impatience, we frequently say or do something just as bad or worse as was done to us! Then where are we? Often, our [patience](#) does not delay our wrath as God's does.

The obvious meaning of Paul's advice is that we should not take vengeance. In [Romans 12:19](#), Paul repeats this more plainly:

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

This, in turn, feeds directly into Jesus' teaching in [Matthew 5:39-45](#), where Jesus' consistent instruction is that we not set ourselves against an evil person who is injuring us, whether verbally, physically or judicially. Rather, [Jesus](#) teaches us to be willing to give the offender something that might defuse the immediate situation—and perhaps even provide some small example that will promote his eternal welfare. Patience is of great value in this respect.

This in no way means we are weak, though to them we may at first seem so. Nor does it mean that we approve of their conduct. Though we may hate their conduct and suffer keenly when it affects us, Christ tells us to bless them, meaning we should confer favor upon or give benefits to them. We can do this by wishing the person well, speaking kindly of and to him, and seeking to do him good.

Situations like this may be the most difficult test we will ever face. Patiently deferring retaliation and committing the circumstance to God's judgment are indispensable to the best possible solution. But the primary point of Jesus' instruction, however, is not how to resolve these situations, but that we may be children of our Father. By imitating God's pattern, we will resemble Him and take a giant stride toward being in His image.



John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience](#)

Related Topics: [Anger](#) | [Impatience](#) | [Patience](#) | [Retaliation](#) | [Revenge](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Vengeance](#) | [Wrath](#)

[2 Timothy 1:6-7](#)

According to *Strong's Concordance*, the final word of verse 7 is a noun meaning "discipline" or "self-control." Most modern translations render it as "self-control," but "sensible," "sobriety," "[self-discipline](#)," "self-restraint," "wise discretion," and "sound judgment" are also used.

[God](#) gives His Spirit to us to begin the spiritual creation that will bring us into His very image. Here, Paul ranks self-control right beside seemingly more "important" attributes of our Creator, such as courage, power, and love. Remember, however, that the "fruit" of God's Spirit is written in the singular; it is one fruit, a balanced package needed to make a son of God whole.

These verses tell us what kind of men God is creating. Men of courage, power, and love - and men who are self-governing, sensible, sober, restrained, and disciplined in their manner of life. These qualities are products of God's Spirit in us.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Courage](#) | [Discipline](#) | [Discretion](#) | [Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Fruits of the Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit "in" us](#) | [Holy Spirit, Stirring up the Gift of](#) | [Judgment](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Self Restraint](#)

[2 Timothy 1:6](#)

When Paul admonishes us to "stir up the gift" in us, he is really telling us to discipline ourselves to put what we say we believe into action. He speaks most specifically about the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the intent of his admonition includes all of the truths we have received as a result of [God](#) giving us His Spirit.

Because of grace, the elect are responsible to God to act in agreement with these truths. To act contrary to them is to quench the Spirit. Resisting the truth stifles and smothers good results; it inhibits growth into God's image. [Proverbs 25:28](#) says, "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is



like a city broken down, without walls." Such a person is defenseless against destructive forces that pressure him to submit. To do the right requires discipline, the self-control to act in agreement with truth, because virtually everything in life - including [Satan](#), the world's enticements, and our appetites - works against our fervent submission to God. Thus, Paul charges us to exercise the control to stir up the gift.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Eating: How Good It Is! \(Part Five\)](#)

Related Topics: [Gift of the Holy Spirit](#) | [God's Holy Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit](#) | [Holy Spirit "in" us](#) | [Holy Spirit, Stirring up the Gift of](#) | [Holy Spirit Given to Those Who Obey](#) | [Holy Spirit, Gift of](#) | [Holy Spirit, Quenching](#) | [Holy Spirit, Using](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Spiritual Growth](#) | [Spiritual Growth, Process of](#) | [Spiritual Maturity](#) | [Spiritual Maturity, Process of](#)



[2 Timothy 3:6-7](#)

The word "self-control" does not appear in these verses, but its lack is a major part of these women's problem. Their exact problem is unknown, but what we see here makes a good illustration.

Many modern versions change "the knowledge" in verse 7 to "acknowledge." Spiros Zodhiates says regarding this Greek word, "In the New Testament, it often refers to knowledge which very powerfully influences the *form* of religious life, a knowledge laying claim to *personal involvement*." Put another way, this word indicates not mere agreement with or admission of truth newly found but of truth already affecting the seeker's life. The knowledge these women received was not affecting their lives for the better.

Our challenge in life is not to become a tremendous reservoir of information that indeed may be true, but to control and rightly use what we already have while continuing to seek yet more. We acknowledge truth only when we use it in our lives, something these ladies were not doing. Considering the flood of information we have at our fingertips in this computer age, it is vital for us to understand that [God](#) judges us according to how well we use what we have.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Eating: How Good It Is! \(Part Six\)](#)

Related Topics: [Acknowledging the Truth](#) | [Doers of the Law](#) | [Hearers and Doers](#) | [Seeking Truth](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Using Wisdom](#)

[Titus 2:1-6](#)

These instructions are an overall exhortation for the various age groups to hold to a sense of duty with regard to their conduct. But none of the instructions given here should be ignored simply because they are not addressed directly to an individual's sex or age group. For example, Paul says "girls should be discreet and modest." Does this mean, then, because it is addressed to girls that a fellow may be as indiscreet and immodest as he wants because he is male? Simply because the fellows are not mentioned does not excuse them from being discreet and modest as well. In an overall sense, [God](#) is telling all of us—parents, young people, male, female—to be sane, sober-thinking, serious about our responsibilities, exercising self-control, curbing our passions, and aiming for self-mastery.

There is a proverb that teaches: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city." Ruling one's spirit involves [self-discipline](#). Self-discipline is willing yourself to do the right, regardless of feelings. It may not be glamorous, but it is the stuff of life.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[Sanctification and the Teens](#)

Related Topics: [Discretion](#) | [Irresponsibility](#) | [Modesty](#) | [Responsibility](#) | [Responsibility, Sense of](#) | [Sanctification of Teens](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Sober \(minded\)](#) | [Sobriety](#) | [Temperance](#) | [Youthful Indiscretion](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

For the grace of [God](#) has appeared to save all men, and it schools us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and to live a life of self-mastery, of integrity, and of godliness in this present world, awaiting the blessed [hope](#) of the appearance of the Glory of the great God and of our Savior Christ [Jesus](#), who gave Himself up for us to redeem us from all iniquity and secure Himself a clean people, with a zest for good deeds. (Moffatt Translation)

One reason God has given us grace is for us to express self-control. It is hard to imagine a Christian, preparing for the [Kingdom of God](#), who does not strive for continual and resolute self-government, that is, one who allows his passions, tastes, and desires unbridled freedom to express themselves. That is what [the world](#) does! When we witness such a demonstration, it gives strong evidence that the person is unconverted. Blind passion is not meant to be our guide. If men live



guided by their animal passions, they will land in the ditch because "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" ([Galatians 6:7](#)).

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Reaping and Sowing](#) | [Reaping and Sowing Principle](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Government](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Self Restraint](#) | [Sowing and Reaping](#)

[Hebrews 10:24-25](#)

The New Testament stresses that Christians need the fellowship of others of like mind. An identifying mark of the [true church](#) is that the members have love for one another ([John 13:35](#)). Indeed, one of the criteria by which [Christ](#) will judge us is how we treat our brethren in the church ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)). How can we love and serve one another if we do not fellowship with and get to know each other?

[God](#) has given us ample instruction regarding how we should relate to other Christians. It is His purpose to teach us how to get along with each other so we can teach others about these things in the Millennium. We are to be unselfish and concerned for the needs of others ([Philippians 2:4](#)). God wants us to learn [patience](#) and forgiveness ([Colossians 3:13](#)), striving to be "kindly affectionate," humble, and self-effacing in our dealings with one another ([Romans 12:10](#)). We should be giving and hospitable to our brethren (verse 13).

The New Testament is replete with various admonitions on how we should interact with our brothers and sisters in the church. Obviously, God views our interaction with other Christians as vital to our training to become members of the God Family and qualifying for a position in His Kingdom. He wants us to develop interpersonal skills that equip us to deal with occasional differences of opinion and [offenses](#).

Our fellowship should be a source of encouragement to one another. We should use this time to show love to our brethren and to motivate them to perform acts of [kindness](#) and service for others. All of these exhortations show a clear need for us to be part of an organization of God's people. God's [Sabbath](#) service is like a weekly training school for Christians. The spiritual food that God's true ministers prepare for us is vitally important for our spiritual growth and development. In discussing the relationship of the ministry to the church member, Paul explains that the ministry is given



for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the [faith](#) and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. ([Ephesians 4:12-13](#))

The interaction that we have with one another when we fellowship at church services helps us to develop the fruit of God's Spirit—love, [joy](#), [peace](#), longsuffering, kindness, [goodness](#), faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). Paul shows that the church is truly Christ's body, and like the human body, each part depends upon the other parts.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[For the Perfecting of the Saints](#)

Related Topics: [Faith](#) | [Fellowship](#) | [Fellowship of Believers](#) | [Fellowship with God](#) | [Fellowship, Forsaking](#) | [Gentleness](#) | [Independent Christians](#) | [Joy](#) | [Kindness](#) | [Love](#) | [Love as the Identifying Mark of the True Church](#) | [Love for Brethren](#) | [Love for Christ](#) | [Love for God](#) | [Patience](#) | [Peace](#) | [Relationship with Christ](#) | [Relationship with God](#) | [Relationships](#) | [Relationships with Brethren](#) | [Relationships With People](#) | [Self Control](#)

[James 1:12-15](#)

As soon as we are tempted, we must begin to deny ourselves the wrong desire. [Jesus](#) calls us to practice self-denial in our actions even before we do them. Temptations vary according to the weaknesses of each person. What may be an easy self-denial for one may be tough to resist for another. Appetite ([Proverbs 23:2](#)), material goods, worldly ambitions, personal prestige ([Matthew 6:1-4](#), 16-21), and sexual desires are very common areas where self-denial is tough for many.

Martin G. Collins

[Overcoming \(Part 5\): Self-Denial](#)

Related Topics: [Appetite, Control of](#) | [Desire](#) | [Overcoming](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Denial](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Sexual Immorality](#) | [Sexual Sins](#) | [Temptation](#) | [Temptation as a Forerunner to Sin](#) | [Temptation, Help in Resisting](#)

[James 1:13-15](#)

Every problem, individual or national, has its root embedded in [sin](#). But what causes sin? Wrong desires brought to fruition, and everyone—from peasant to king—is subject to wrong desires. From



the beginning of time, sinners have blamed their sins on others. [Satan](#) blamed [God](#), Eve blamed Satan, and Adam blamed Eve. James sternly rebukes this.

God does not cause sin, nor do things. Sin would be helpless if it did not appeal to something in man. Sin appeals to man's human nature through his desires. If a man desires long enough, the consequence is virtually inevitable. Desire becomes action.

Desire can be nourished, stifled or—by the grace of God—eliminated altogether. If we humbly, thoughtfully, and wholly give of ourselves to [Christ](#) and involve ourselves in good activities and thoughts, we will have precious little time or place for evil desires. The [tenth commandment](#) pierces through surface Christianity, really showing whether we have surrendered our will to God.

The spiritual requirements for keeping it are in some ways more rigid than any other because it pierces directly into our thoughts. [II Corinthians 10:4-5](#) sets a very high standard for us to shoot for:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

These verses, revealing God's authority over even our thoughts, also sets what may be our ultimate goal in this life. The tenth commandment shows the depth of God's concern about the state of our inner character as well as our apparent character. If our thoughts are right, our actions will be too. Changing our thinking strikes right at the heart of character, emphasizing why spending time with God, in studying His Word and in prayer, is so important.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Tenth Commandment \(1998\)](#)

Related Topics: [Bringing Thoughts into Captivity](#) | [Carnal Nature](#) | [Character](#) | [Desire](#) | [Human Nature](#) | [Prayer](#) | [Self Control](#) | [The Tenth Commandment](#)

[James 3:1](#)

James begins with a piece of general advice that leads to his main discussion of the use of the tongue. [God](#) holds us all accountable for what we have learned as well as how we instruct others. In the various situations of life, we are often both receiving instruction and giving instruction, so he warns that we need to examine ourselves closely and realize that God holds those accountable who



would instruct or correct others, whether toward the brethren, our mates, our children, or our friends.

Staff

[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Self Control](#) | [Self Examination](#) | [Speech](#) | [Speech, Reckless](#) | [Tongue](#) | [Tongue, Control of](#) | [Words, Controlling our](#) | [Words, Power of](#)

[James 3:1-8](#)

What [hope](#) do we have as men if "no man can tame the tongue"? Mothers once washed their children's mouths out with soap for using bad language or expressing verbal disrespect. The entertainment media have made such words part of our households, schools, and workplaces. James' admonishment is not a soap-and-water application or a fatherly reprimand. His statements are blunt instruments: The tongue is as a vicious animal, whose words are capable of causing ultimate destruction, and it is as a creature of such monstrous character that no man can tame it.

As a kid, I loved to play "Cowboys and Indians," and when I heard "no man can tame the tongue," I imagined a tongue running around like a loose calf, with a cowboy on horseback riding frantically, trying to rope it down and tame it. It is a silly scene, but even now when I think about it, how accurately it pictures the feeling of trying to run after my own words and tame them after I have let them loose!

Staff

[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Self Control](#) | [Self Examination](#) | [Speech](#) | [Speech, False](#) | [Speech, Reckless](#) | [Speech, Vile and Filthy](#) | [Taming the Tongue](#) | [Tongue](#) | [Tongue, Control of](#) | [Tongue, Taming the](#) | [Words, Controlling our](#) | [Words, Power of](#)

[James 3:2](#)

We all make mistakes—and probably a majority of them are verbal. The challenge before us is to learn to control our words and use them effectively in dealing with others. For followers of [Christ](#), "effective use of words" is using them as Christ and the Father do. If we do anything less, we stumble and run the risk of offending.



So great is this challenge that, if we can master our tongue, we have in essence come to master our entire bodies. We could conclude from this that our bodies function as they are instructed. We instruct our bodies and minds through words, whether spoken or thought. In other words, the mind speaks, and the body follows. We lead ourselves, as well as others, with our words.

Staff

[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Offending a Brother](#) | [Offending by Words](#) | [Offense](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Self Mastery](#) | [Self Restraint](#) | [Sharp Tongue](#) | [Speech](#) | [Tongue](#) | [Tongue as Fire](#) | [Tongue, Control of](#) | [Words, Controlling our](#) | [Words, Idle](#) | [Words, Power of](#)



[James 3:3-4](#)

James makes three interesting comparisons. First, the horse has historically been considered symbolic of strength, endurance, speed, gracefulness, agility, beauty, and loyalty. At certain times in history, men have preferred to be buried next to their horses rather than their wives! How many countless times has the horse been the deciding factor in battle, in travel, in survival? Yet this powerful animal can be rendered as docile as a puppy by placing a small bit in its mouth, through which it learns to obey every command its master might give it.

Second, the wind drives and tosses giant ships on the seas as if they were toys. Wind, especially at sea, evokes the fierceness of war, raging into every crevice and overturning everything in its path. Calm it down, however, and it becomes a gentle, cooling, refreshing breeze. Gentle winds can bring pleasant fragrances and invigorating fresh air. Having grown up near the Pacific Ocean, nothing quite stirs me like a fresh wind off the sea. Words, like wind, can be unbelievable forces of destruction that leave nothing and no one standing in their paths. But tamed, slowed down, and controlled, they can be refreshing, fragrant breezes across our faces.

Third, rudders manipulate the course of immense ocean vessels with a slight movement of a pilot's hand. Since it is underwater and aft, the rudder of a ship does its work unseen. A passenger is ignorant of its movements most of the time. Yet, when it is in proper working order, the rudder holds more power over the ship than the wind. The wind will blow, toss, even destroy the ship's rigging, but the rudder guides the ship exactly where it directs. James wants us to contemplate—as horses are controlled by bits in the mouth and ships by rudders below the stern—what tools we might use to control our words, which can be as dynamic as a horse or fierce as the wind. Learning to use that bit and rudder is the challenge!

Staff[Are You Sharp-Tongued? \(Part One\)](#)

Related Topics: [Bit as Metaphor](#) | [Control of Tongue](#) | [Horse as Metaphor](#) | [Rudder as Metaphor](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Sharp Tongue](#) | [Tongue, Control of](#) | [Wind as Metaphor](#) | [Wind Imagery](#)

[1 Peter 5:8-9](#)

This verse indicates that there is little room for [carelessness](#). We are being called upon to be thoroughly self-controlled and to be alert. Why? Because [Satan](#) aims to undermine our confidence, to sow discord, and to get us to stop believing and revert to carnality. These are the directions in which he will try to push us.

Notice Peter writes, "Whom he *may* devour." "May" indicates permission is given. He has the ability to devour us spiritually, but it does not have to happen. Putting the advice in verse 8 into more common language, instead of saying, "Be sober," we might say, "Keep cool," "Keep your head screwed on right," "Don't lose your presence of mind," "Try to keep calm about this," "Don't be fearful," or "Don't lose your temper."

He also says to "Be vigilant," which means "to watch." This same phraseology is used in reference to prayer. It is part of our responsibility to pray that we not enter into temptation. It is part of being vigilant.

All of these things—the roaring lion, the resisting, the afflictions, suffering, persecution, perfection, and strength—are related as parts of operations that fulfill God's purpose for us. We have to begin by understanding that Satan—despite his incredible intelligence, cleverness, and power—is still yet an unwitting dupe in God's hand to bring about His purpose. [God](#) is far more powerful than Satan. As great as is Satan's power over us, God's is far greater over Satan.

John W. Ritenbaugh[Satan \(Part 5\)](#)

Related Topics: [Fear](#) | [Fear, Control of](#) | [Fearfulness](#) | [Satan as Lion](#) | [Satan as Predator](#) | [Satan's Devices](#) | [Satan's Stratagems](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Temper](#) | [Temper, Control of](#) | [Vigilance](#) | [Watchfulness](#)

[1 Peter 5:8-9](#)

[Satan](#) is a formidable enemy, to be sure, but in a personal sense, he is not as directly dangerous to us as [the world](#) or our own human nature. The chances of his confronting us individually are small in comparison to the influences of our ever-present hearts and the world in which we conduct our lives. Certainly, as our [Adversary](#), he "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" ([I Peter 5:8](#)), but unlike [God](#), he is not omniscient. While he can be only at one place at one time, he has many assistants.

We are far more likely to be confronted by one of his demon assistants than the Adversary himself, which is bad enough. However, he and his demons have constructed attitudes, institutions, systems, and entertainments into the course of this world, which they effectively use against us, even when they are absent from the scene. Most of their evil influence comes from the system.

We need to remember, though, that God has put a wall of protection around us, so demons can go only so far in their attempts to corrupt us and destroy our loyalty to God and His truth ([Job 1:6-10](#)). Their major responsibility before God at this time appears to be to provide tests for us to meet and overcome, in the same way God used Satan to test Job and to tempt Christ (Matthew 4; Luke 4). In this respect, they play a large role in helping us to recognize evil.

God gives us advice regarding them in [I Peter 5:8-9](#): "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the [faith](#), knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." In essence, His advice is, "Be self-controlled, be alert, and resist him!" Peter's first term, "be sober," urges us not to let fear of him fluster us to the point that we cannot think clearly. The second term, "be vigilant," charges us to be fully awake, to set ourselves in a state of watchfulness and readiness. The third term, "resist him," is a command not to turn and run but to stand firm.

This instruction lets us know that Satan is not all-powerful. With the protections God provides, including His continuous presence and alert regard for His children, Satan can be beaten. The same [Jesus](#) who has already defeated Satan is on His throne, overseeing our well-being. His protection is not something we flaunt, but is power we can rely on.

[James 4:7](#) adds additional advice: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Again, the charge is to resist, but it is directly coupled with submission to God. Submission is the voluntarily act of placing oneself under the authority of another to show respect and give obedience. If we submit to God, Satan will flee.

[Ephesians 6:11](#) parallels the other two instructions. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." "Stand against" is yet another way of saying "resist him." "Stand" in the Greek indicates that one must hold fast a critical position as an army must do in warfare. However, it is not a passive term, describing something like an unmoving brick wall, but



an aggressive, attacking term. In other words, we are to hold the ground we have already gained by going forward.

How, then, do we resist? How do we hold our ground by going on the offensive? We must return in thought to [I Peter 5:9](#), where the first phrase is better translated as, "Resist him, standing firm [or solid] in the faith." Putting this into military terms, a soldier would be likely commanded, "Do not surrender! Do not give up any ground! Do not back down! Move forward with all you've got! Reinforcements are right behind you."

We have the God-backed promise that Satan will flee! Who can resist God's will? The key words here are "standing firm" and "faith." "Standing firm" or "solid" is used in the sense of "unmovable." When linked with faith in practical terms, it means we are absolutely sure or immovably convicted in the face of a strong test.

Overall, the apostles' instruction suggests that what we experience vis-à-vis Satan is common to this way of life. Their advice does not say that he will flee immediately, but flee he will. As used here, "faith" can be understood as either a personal trust in God or confidence in Christian doctrine, as either one fits the context. Ultimately, if we use our relationship with God properly, the confidence in Christian doctrine becomes trust in God Himself.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Christian Fight \(Part Two\)](#)

Related Topics: [Demonic Influence](#) | [Demonic principalities](#) | [Demons](#) | [Resisting Satan](#) | [Satan](#) | [Satan as Lion](#) | [Satan as Predator](#) | [Satan's Influence](#) | [Satan's Power](#) | [Satan's power Limited by God](#) | [Satan, Resisting](#) | [Self Control](#) | [Self Discipline](#) | [Standing Firm](#) | [Steadfastness](#) | [Submission to God](#) | [Submission to God's Will](#) | [Trust in God](#) | [Vigilance](#)

[1 John 2:16](#)

The apostle John notes three powerful pulls that must be controlled. These, he says, are not of the Father but of [the world](#), therefore they are not part of the standard that we must strive to live according to. If we follow them, we will continue to be conformed to the world.

Our eyes make us the recipients of a multitude of impressions. Many of them can excite us to desire something evil, and if we are complacent, we can be trapped in a [sin](#) almost without thinking. That is precisely the problem! We must be thinking to control what we have power and responsibility over and turn from such things as if a hot poker were about to be jabbed into our eyes! When Joseph was about to be lured into sin, he ran, controlling his own part in that unfolding drama ([Genesis 39:11-12](#)).



The body and mind possess appetites and needs that can easily lead to sinful excesses if not controlled. They can lead any of us away in a hundred different directions from the supreme devotion to Him that He desires for our good. Note the senseless luxury of this present generation, the exaggerated care of the physical body, and the intemperance in eating and drinking, which are a curse and shame on America! Our culture has molded us to seek ample provision for the flesh and material comforts far beyond our needs, drowning the spirit and producing needless anxieties. We have to learn to subordinate the drive to satisfy these insatiable appetites so they do not master us and lead us into sin.

John W. Ritenbaugh

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

Related Topics: [Appetite, Control of](#) | [Desire](#) | [Joseph](#) | [Love of the World](#) | [Lust](#) | [Lust of the Eyes](#) | [Lust of the Flesh](#) | [Pride](#) | [Pride of Life](#) | [Self Control](#) | [World's Influence](#) | [Worldliness](#)



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