

Galatians 5:22-26

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.** ²⁴ **And those *who are Christ's* have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** ²⁵ **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.** ²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

The next spiritual “**fruit**” is that of “**self-control**” which is the Greek word “*enkrateia*”. It is a word that speaks directly of the individual deliberately choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to bring their will under His influence and His power.¹ In many definitions of self-control, the problem that exists is that the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit is absent. Obviously, when this fruit of the Spirit is operating in a believer’s life, they will have the ability to control their emotions, control their speech, and control their thought life. The problem is that biblically it is not actually “self” control, but Spirit control that is being addressed in this passage. This is the Holy Spirit’s fruit that He develops in the believer’s life, so His help is critical to the believer being able to actually exercise self-control in their life.

When addressing the subject of self-control, there are two things that specifically come to mind. The first is that there is something innately difficult within every believer that needs to be constantly controlled. The second observation is that I cannot do this alone and need to draw on the work of God in my life to restrain me from doing those things that I know are displeasing to God. It is not just someone’s behavior that is necessarily in focus, but the emotions below that behavior that draw out the wrong and inappropriate responses to the difficult moments in life. Self-control is emotional, it is mental, it is physical, and it is much more than just simple self-renunciation. Just saying “no” in the face of temptation is simple, but it is not always easy. Here is what self-control realizes – it realizes that it is not the individual bringing themselves under their own control, but bringing themselves under the power of the Holy Spirit working in their life. That is why at the outset of this subject, it is imperative that we come to the place where we do not see “**self-control**” as something that we do, but as something that is actually outside of ourselves. That is why it is called “**the fruit of the Spirit**” because it is His divine work in the believer. It is not something that the believer just whips up in his life or something where he in and of himself just drums up this thing called willpower – not at all. If we do that and are successful, then we get the glory. What we are after is to control what we do and how we live in the power that the Holy Spirit gives to us. We come humbly to Him and admit openly of all of our failures, our inadequacies, and even of an emptiness that we suffer when we try to live out the Christian life in our own power. Maybe stated another way, being able to control ourselves is simply allowing our life to be controlled by Christ. It should be self-evident that because this virtue of self-control is a gift to the believer from the Holy Spirit, we should have the greatest hope possible that we can truly grow in this area of our life.²

Obviously, Christ is our example of self-control. His life was the utter epitome of this virtue. He lived His entire life without sin, and there was never any deceit found in His mouth. He never reviled back or repaid evil with evil. He sweat drops of blood in the garden, but stayed the course. He did not even

¹ Vine, 1126.

² Mathis, ep.

defend Himself before Pilate, but allowed men to brutally beat Him while He was blindfolded. They slapped His face, spit in His face, plucked out His beard, scourged His back until it was raw. They nailed Him to a cross, and He never flinched.³ [Philippians 2:8](#) says it this way,

Php 2:8 (NKJV) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus was a man's man, and He has the power to give to us to live as He lived.

A person who has this quality in their life will not be ruled by their passions and lusts, but will be able to resist temptations.⁴ What is important about this word is that it primarily speaks not so much to a person's will as it does to the power of the indwelling Spirit in that believer's life.⁵ It is a word that refers to someone's personal restraint.⁶ For instance, in [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) it is speaking to those who are not married and refers to control, or lack thereof, of sexual desires.

1Co 7:9 (NKJV) but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

In [1 Corinthians 9:25](#) it speaks of an athlete who is training for competition and it says,

1Co 9:25 (NKJV) And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

I.e., the athlete is striving to reach a particular goal, and so he chooses to refrain from all of those activities and misplaced appetites that he knows would hinder him from reaching that goal. He had to have control over his appetites, over his schedule and time constraints, and over his mind. It is a very difficult thing to always be pushing yourself to the limit physically and mentally, but it was necessary if the athlete wanted to win. In the ancient Olympic games, the athletes were required to be in controlled training for ten months, and immediately before the games, they were to be in the gymnasium under the direction of the judges who had been instructed for ten months on how the games were to be controlled. What was important about this training, though, is that its primary emphasis was dietary and not just the physical training part for the games. One author wrote this about the training: "*Thou must be orderly, living on spare food,; abstain from confections; make a point of exercising at the appointed time, in heat and in cold; nor drink cold water nor wine at hazard.*"⁷ No professional athlete who is undisciplined and lacks self-control will be able to excel at his sport.

One of the important nuances of this word is that the believer exercises this self-control not just for himself, but just as much for the sake of others, for the sake of other believers.⁸ He fully recognizes that if he does not exercise a godly restraint on the many different areas of his life that he will fail in his witness, fail in his personal integrity, and ultimately bring dishonor on the body of Christ.

³ Mathis, ep.

⁴ Ryken, 233-234.

⁵ Harris, "enkrateia", ep.

⁶ Renn, 962.

⁷ Precept, *Galatians 5:23, self-control*, ep.

⁸ Kittel, 341.

So, this is a word that speaks of someone's appetites and desires, especially ungodly urges and cravings that they may have. It means that the individual has brought those cravings and urges under control. It means that they have learned self-restraint, how to stand against the cravings that the lower nature so often has, as well as all of the things that the world offers to the flesh.⁹ [1 John 2:15-16](#) speaking of these things says,

1Jn 2:15 (NKJV) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.

One of my favorite verses relative to self-control is [Proverbs 16:32](#) which says,

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

It seems so very difficult for someone to control their temper and their tongue when they become agitated or angry at someone. It is as if they just want to lash back at someone. However, when we do, it is simply a sign that our life and our tongue are not under the control of the Holy Spirit. Nothing good can come from this often repeated scenario – nothing, not one good thing.

[Proverbs 25:28](#) says,

Pr 25:28 (NKJV) Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls.

What this verse indicates is that in ancient times that cities were fortified with walls, and if they did not have a wall that surrounded the city, then the city became very vulnerable to attack from both roaming bands of marauders, as well as armies of their enemies. In the same way, those who have no self-control are very vulnerable for the enemy to attack their life. The individual who does not understand and does not exercise self-control does not have the ability or the power to resist evil, to resist temptations, and to resist the inclinations and propensities of the flesh. Self-control is critical to this whole process. What someone is not able to resist is generally that which destroys their life, their families, and God's work in them. We become tired, mentally exhausted and weary, frustrated with other people, disappointed with our circumstances, and before you know it we find ourselves taking that weariness and frustration out on other people – and especially those that we love the most. Please remember that the flesh is always lurking for just a moment of weakness, just a small opening.¹⁰

Believers who do not possess this quality of self-control in their life will continue to live in bondage to ungodly desires and impulses. They will live in bondage to the various appetites of the flesh that have the power to rule over a person's life when there is a lack of self-control. It is important that we not think of self-control as some kind of inner strength that we possess, but rather as the power of the Holy Spirit working in our life. It is the believer continually yielding themselves to His Word, His influence, and His strength simply because no believer is a match for the flesh without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit working in their life. It would be safe to say that all of these nine attributes are totally dependent on the believer constantly yielding and submitting their life to the work of the Holy Spirit in them. The believer's part is to walk in the Spirit, to live in the Spirit, and to be led by the Spirit so that

⁹ Practical, 2084, ep.

¹⁰ Precept, *Galatians 5:23, self-control*, ep.

His fruit can be produced in their life. It is important to appreciate that not allowing the Holy Spirit to develop this quality in the believer's life will constantly mar and hinder a person's usefulness to God. They will lack self-control in their various passions and drives, they will lack self-control in what they say to others, and God simply cannot use a person who has no restraints on what they say and do. My personal opinion, and it is only that, is that the first place to begin in this area of self-control is with the tongue, with our speech, with how we talk to people and treat people verbally. We have already seen in [James 3](#) that the tongue is a fire and can create havoc in a person's relationships with other people.

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