



18 September 2026

Self-Control

All of us have experienced situations in which it was difficult to control ourselves.

Self-control has been described as the ability to resist your impulses, to exercise restraint, to deny yourself, and as self-mastery. In psychology it sometimes is called self-regulation.

The New Testament word is made up of the words strength and within. So strength within yourself, or power over yourself. The various forms of this word occur only seven times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 25 as Paul compares the discipline of athletes in training to our discipline in living for Christ, he wrote, “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.” As he wrote to Titus Paul said elders in the church must be self-controlled” (1:8).

The danger of not having self-control is pictured in Proverbs chapter 25 verse 28, “Like a city that is broken into and without walls so is a person who has no self-control over his spirit.”

Scripture tells us self-control is important to ...

- having a Christ-like character, which we see in our text of Galatians chapter 5 verse 23.
- To be able to put off the old, sinful life and live out our new life in Christ, as Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 22 and 23.
- To being able to have victory over temptation and sin, as James develops in the first chapter of his letter, verses 13 through 15.
- To control our reactions, anger, our speech. Proverbs chapter 14 tells us “One who is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered exalts foolishness.” Recall James’ words, “Now everyone must be quick to hear and slow to speak; for a man’s anger does not bring about the righteousness of God” (19-20).
- To control our use of material things. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy chapter 6, “godliness is actually a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment” (6).



So, how do we develop godly self-control, this gift of the Holy Spirit?

The “Just say no!” approach is not good enough.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to develop self-control in us requires intense effort on our part. Paul’s testimony is a good example for us. Colossians chapter 1 verse 29, “I also labor, striving according to His [God’s] power which works mightily within me.” Go back to his comparison with the athlete in training, “everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.”

It also requires our striving in God’s power, not our own alone. Paul labored, strove according to God’s power which was working mightily, powerfully within him.

Then too, we need to rely on the transforming work the Spirit does in us through God’s Word. You recall God’s words through Paul,

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

Self-control sometimes is seen as limiting, restricting. In a sense that is true, but it limits and protects us from unhealthy, harmful and sinful things to be safe and healthy. Small children can run freely and safely in a fenced yard, but not in an open area. How many of us as parents recall the terrifying time when our little child took off and we lost sight of him. Even though in the overwhelmingly large number of situations this ends well, sometimes it has ended badly, even very badly. Self-control is one of the qualities the Holy Spirit builds within us to keep us safe, to grow us to being healthy, to be like our Savior.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Pastor Lyle