

What Does the Bible Say About Self-Control?

We live in an age of indulgence that tells us to follow every impulse, satisfy every appetite, and never tell ourselves no. The Bible calls for the opposite. It calls for self-control, what the King James names temperance, the discipline to rule ourselves rather than be ruled by our desires. It is one of the surest marks of a person ruled by the word of God and not by the flesh. Let us see what the Scriptures teach.

Self-Control Is the Fruit of the Spirit

Self-control stands at the end of the fruit of the Spirit, named there as *"temperance"* ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). It grows in those who live by the Spirit's word, who can say that *"they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts"* ([Galatians 5:24](#)). The grace of God itself is a teacher of it, training us that we *"should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* ([Titus 2:12](#)). This is no grim, joyless thing. It is the freedom of a person who is no longer dragged about by his own cravings.

Without It a Man Has No Defense

Solomon drew a vivid picture of the person who never learned self-control. *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"* ([Proverbs 25:28](#)). A city without walls cannot keep out any enemy that wishes to enter. So it is with a man who cannot govern his appetites and his temper. Every temptation that comes along walks right in, because there is nothing to stop it. Self-control is the wall that guards everything else.

Master the Body, Do Not Serve It

Paul compared the Christian life to an athlete in training. *"every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things"*, and then of himself, *"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* ([1 Corinthians 9:25-27](#)). The body, with its hungers for food, drink, comfort, and pleasure, makes a good servant and a terrible master. The disciplined person tells his body what it may have and when. The undisciplined person is told by his body, and obeys.

Sometimes the Wisest Course Is to Flee

Some desires are so strong that the wisest self-control is not to stand and fight them but to flee. Paul told young Timothy to *"Flee also youthful lusts"* ([2 Timothy 2:22](#)), and warned the Corinthians, *"Flee fornication"* ([1 Corinthians 6:18](#)). When Potiphar's wife caught hold of Joseph, he did not stay to reason with the temptation. He left his garment in her hand and ran ([Genesis 39:12](#)). There is no shame in running from a sin you cannot safely stand near. Real self-control knows its own weakness and keeps itself out of reach of what it could not handle up close.

Ruling the Spirit and the Tongue

Self-control is not only about the appetites of the body. It governs the temper and the tongue as well. *"he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city"* ([Proverbs 16:32](#)). To conquer one's own temper is a greater victory than to conquer a city. James joined the same idea to our speech, urging that every man be *"swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"* ([James 1:19](#)). The mouth and the temper, left ungoverned, do more damage than almost anything else.

Be Sober and Watchful

There is an enemy who counts on our weakness here. *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* ([1 Peter 5:8](#)). The undisciplined Christian, drowsy and indulgent, is easy prey. Peter listed temperance among the graces we must add and grow in ([2 Peter 1:6](#)). So take the reins of your own life. By the word the Spirit gave, learn to tell yourself no, to govern your appetites, your temper, and your tongue. Rule yourself, or your desires will rule you, and a man ruled by his appetites is not free at all.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.