

Life on the Vine
Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community

Lesson Nine: **Self-control**

Introduction

1. Why is self-control or self-discipline important in sports?
2. Does the self-discipline of athletes always carry over into all areas of their lives? Why is self-control so difficult? Why is it so easy to give into our desires and passions? What are we seeking when we let our desires control our lives?

Lesson Plan

1. The word Paul used for “self-control” was a word very familiar to the Galatian people. The Greek culture and its great philosophers valued self-control (*egkrateia*—which literally means to have power or authority over something) as the very basis of all other virtues. The Galatians would have been taught that this was the beginning point. It is interesting that Paul places this virtue at the end of his list. Is he implying that self-control comes only after other virtues—or could he be implying that self-control has a different source than self?
2. How is self-control actually an oxymoron?
3. In addition to listing self-control at the end of his list, Paul uses this word rarely in his writings. (This word appears only 6 times in the entire New Testament in addition to the Galatian passage: Acts 24.25; 1 Corinthians 7.9; 9.25; Titus 1.8; and 2 Peter 1.6). This is remarkable given its common usage in the Greek world. Scripture certainly is aware of the problem of unbridled desires.

We are warned that “people are slaves to whatever masters them” (2 Peter 2.19). However, the difference between Greek philosophy (and perhaps our own culture) and the Christian faith is that we do not believe that it is within ourselves to control ourselves. The old self is hopelessly mired in sin. Only by putting to death the old self and allowing Christ (through the Spirit) to live within us can the desires within us be controlled.

4. Spend some time looking at scriptures that make this point about the need for the old self to die and Christ to live in us.
 - Galatians 2.19-20
 - Ephesians 4.22-24
 - Colossians 3.1-10
 - Romans 8.12-17.
 - Romans 6—the entire chapter discusses this

5. Note also that Paul brackets his list of the fruit of the Spirit with exhortation to allow the Spirit to control us rather than our flesh—Galatians 5.16-21 and 5.24-25. Perhaps this is another reason that self-control is listed as the final fruit of the Spirit. Just as all the fruit flow from love, self-control is the ultimate fruit—for in it we have yielded to the ultimate control of the Spirit.
6. What might be some better words to translate *egkrateia*?
7. If time allows, it might be helpful to discuss how all our desires are God-given desires that have a Godly function in our lives when they are directed properly. The ancient church often spoke of “disordered affections”—recognizing that the desires themselves were not ungodly but they could be directed in ungodly ways.

The class might find it helpful to discuss specific desires that often cause us problems and lead to sin and how each of those desires can be directed to a Godly end. Include in this discussion the role of the Spirit in redirecting these desires. How can we access the Spirit’s power when we are tempted to let a desire lead us into sin?

8. You could also discuss how our culture values pleasure and how this value can lead us to allowing our desires to control us.

Obstacles to a life of self-control

1. Pursuing happiness
2. Controlling the self (by the self, for the sake of the self)
3. Moderation in all things

Cultivating Continence