

2010

What Does the Bible Say About Temperance (Self-Control)?

Have you ever lamented the fact that [this world](#) seems out of control? Partly because of rapid transportation and communication, events seem to occur so rapidly that they tumble one upon another. In our minds we are carried furiously along in their current, unable to conclude one event before another hammers away at us for attention. A number of years ago, when it seemed that this world's major powers were careening pell-mell toward a nuclear showdown, we frequently heard the cry, "Stop the world, I want to get off!" Today, major economic crises have overrun several major nations, and like gigantic tidal waves they seem to be sweeping toward the shores of Western nations, which seem powerless to control their inexorable advance.

Events are not really out of control because God is still on His throne. The apostle Paul teaches in [Acts 17:26](#) - *And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;...*, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation." Job agrees:

He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them. He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless wilderness. They grope in the dark without light, and He makes them stagger like a drunken man. ([Job 12:23-25](#) -

²³*He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again.*

²⁴*He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way.*

²⁵*They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.)*

Does a drunken man exhibit much control? No, but in this example, God is manipulating events and men are powerless, though they try to turn aside His plans (see Psalm 2).

We are privileged to live when events—far beyond even nations to control and of vast importance to the outworking of God's purpose—are being maneuvered into position. Most assuredly, God is deeply involved. His dominion is over all creation, but for the present time He has appointed the principalities and powers of this age, to rule over earth ([Ephesians 6:12](#) - *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places....*).

2010

As we approach [Christ's return](#), Satan has designed ways of life that are fast-paced, spiced by a complicated array of sense-appealing entertainments, fashions and gadgets, and filled with a confusing mix of educational, economic, religious and political systems. These lifestyles are in a constant whirl and lived on the edge of disaster. No one has time any more to meditate on how to gain control over his life.

Are we also allowing ourselves to be swept along on the crest of this surging tide of worldliness? Perhaps this is why Satan has created such a system.

Cannot Stop the Tides

We will never control some things. We cannot stop the tides from going in or out. As much as some would like, we cannot control the weather so that it will not [rain](#) on our parade. We must admit that there is far more over which we exercise no control than that which we do. God does not require that we try to control what is beyond us or that we fret because they are beyond us. Some things in life we must learn to accept peacefully, yield to and work our way through. Otherwise, we could find ourselves "beating our heads against a wall" and driving ourselves into the psychological imbalance of always seeing ourselves as victims.

It is sometimes surprising how little control we have over other people—even in our families, our own flesh-and-blood children we have reared from birth. Parents are often shocked by their children's behavior, especially of their teenagers, whom they thought they had trained well. Many parents have discovered that merely telling their children what they can or cannot do—accompanied by warnings of dire punishment—is not enough to control their behavior when the children find themselves under the pressure of a situation.

Perhaps the supreme irony is when we realize how little control we exercise over ourselves. We find ourselves enslaved, even addicted, to habits created and engraved on our character over years of practice. This discovery can be a devastating, humbling blow to the ego. It often occurs after an intense study of Almighty God's standard of thinking, speaking and behaving in contrast to the fashion of the world we have willingly and, in many cases, thoughtlessly followed. Once, there was no [fear of God](#) before our eyes, but when He begins to come into focus in our mind's eye, and we care what He thinks about us, then we begin to be concerned about controlling ourselves.

Self-control is the ninth and last of the [fruits of the Spirit](#) listed by Paul in [Galatians 5:22-23](#) -
²²*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

²³*Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

. Though it is listed last, there can be no doubt about its importance to Christian living. Can a Christian be uncontrolled in his manner of life and still be a Christian? Hardly! Sons of God,

2010

as exemplified by [Jesus Christ](#) and the apostles, are models of lives controlled under the guiding hand of God without relinquishing their free moral agency.

What Self-Control Means

In [Galatians 5:23](#) - *Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law....*, "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](#) - *But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn....*; [9:25](#) - *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible....*) and the adjective form once ([Titus 1:8](#) - *But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;...*). The negative form of the adjective is used three times. In [II Timothy 3:3](#) - *Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,...*, it is translated "without self-control [*incontinent*, KJV]"; in [Matthew 23:25](#) - *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess....*, "self-indulgent [*excess*, KJV]"; and in [I Corinthians 7:5](#) - *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency....*, "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](#): - *He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls....* "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." No specific Hebrew word in this

2010

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](#) - *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city....* 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](#) - *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be....* 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.

Is Self-Control Negative?

When viewed carnally, self-control—especially when linked with self-denial and self-sacrifice—seems to be essentially negative. However, when confronted with a true understanding of what human nature produces, we can see that the fruits of self-control are entirely positive.

In [I Corinthians 9:24-27](#),

²⁴*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

²⁵*And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

²⁶*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

2010

²⁷But 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.

the apostle Paul strongly exhorts us to self-control:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 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. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul uses runners in the Grecian 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, of focus, by 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](#) - *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you....*). 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](#) - *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed...., 8* - *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways....*). 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."

2010

We will have a very difficult time growing under such an approach, as Paul shows in [Hebrews 12:1](#) - *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,...*:

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](#) - *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it....*). 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](#) -

³*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

⁴*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*). 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.

2010

Present Your Bodies

In [Romans 12:1-2](#) -

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

²And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

, Paul comes at this issue from a somewhat different angle, one that comes into play in the individual choices we make during the course of a day:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

His 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](#) - *And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD....; [2:2](#) - And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all*

2010

the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD:... and [3:5](#) - *And Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is upon the wood that is on the fire: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD....* 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 ([1 Peter 2:5](#) - *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ....*). 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](#) - *And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver....*, "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](#) - *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends....*). 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.

Controlling Powerful Pulls

The apostle John notes three powerful pulls that must be controlled: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the [pride](#) of life" ([1 John 2:16](#) - *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world....*). These, he says, are not of the Father but of the world, therefore they are not part of the

2010

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](#) -

¹¹And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

¹²And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.)

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.

Paul's beseeching exhortation is that all activities done by means of brain, eye, tongue, hand and foot be consciously devoted to God and laid as a sacrifice upon His altar. These are costly offerings, and costly offerings often require control in their giving because we inherently desire to hang onto what is dear.

This same apostle exhorts us to "pray without ceasing" ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#) - *Pray without ceasing...*). [Prayer](#) is an act of worship, and a priest's daily work is serving God in behalf of men. This can be done only if the work of our life is worship, being done by God's help for God's purpose. We can do this only if we sacrifice ourselves for it.

Sacrifice requires the surrender of our life and thus control of it. What impressions we allow to be made upon our senses, the indulgences we grant our appetites, the satisfactions we seek for our needs, and the activities we engage in through this fearfully and wonderfully made instrument must now be controlled according to God's standards. Paul writes, "He who sows to his flesh will . . . reap corruption" ([Galatians 6:8](#) - *For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting....*), as well as, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" ([1 Corinthians](#)

2010

[9:27](#)). Here is a powerful yet simple lesson from God: The body is a good servant but a bad master. For our own good and God's glory, we must be its master.

God, the [Holy Spirit](#) and Self-Control

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

⁶Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

⁷For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

makes a significant statement about the importance of self-control:

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

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. Paul adds more to this concept of self-control in [Titus 2:11-14](#) - ¹¹**For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,**

¹²**Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;**

¹³**Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;**

¹⁴**Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Moffatt):**

2010

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.

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](#) - *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*).

Paul writes in [Galatians 5:17](#) - *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would....*, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." 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?

2010

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](#) -

¹²*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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.*

¹³*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.)*

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

In [Luke 11:13](#), - *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?...* 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](#) - *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind....* 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.

Made Strong Out of Weakness

If we will only go to Him and trust Him with ourselves, living in true communion with Him while we [patiently](#) exercise the gifts that He gives, our lives will be in step with what Paul experienced through his "thorn in the flesh":

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." ([II Corinthians 12:8-9](#) –

⁸*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

⁹*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.)*

In [Hebrews 11:32-34](#), -

2010

³²And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

³³Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions.

³⁴Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Paul recounts a few of the deeds of the heroes of faith in ages past:

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the [prophets](#): who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, *out of weakness were made strong*, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

[God's love](#) for us will fan His Spirit in us into responding in courage, strength, love and self-control. He who brought quietness and tranquillity to the raging maniac—whom even chains could not hold—will give us power over the one city which we must govern, ourselves ([Mark 5:1-15](#)). –

¹And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

²And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

³Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

⁴Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

⁵And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

⁶But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

⁷And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

⁸For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

2010

⁹And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

¹⁰And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

¹¹Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

¹²And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

¹³And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

¹⁴And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.

¹⁵And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

We must not allow self-control to be deprecated in our minds to be of minor importance because we are persuaded that "Christ did it all for us." Nor can we allow such a deprecation to lead us to abuse God's mercy.

Self-control is an attribute of our Creator that Jesus exemplified in His life and that Paul strongly exhorts us to exercise in ours. If we are to be made in our Father's image, we will yield to God in this matter to glorify Him with our moderation in all things and rigid resistance to sin.