

# 1 Corinthians 9:25 Commentary

PREVIOUS

1 CORINTHIANS - PROBLEMS OF A LOCAL CHURCH  
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NEXT

## 1 Corinthians 9 Verse by Verse Comments

- [1 Corinthians 9:1 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:2 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:3 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:4 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:5 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:6 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:7 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:8 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:9 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:10 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:11 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:12 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:13 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:14 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:15 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:16 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:17 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:18 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:19 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:20 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:21 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:22 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:23 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:24 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:25 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:26 Commentary](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:27 Commentary](#)

1 Corinthians 9:25 [Everyone](#) who [competes](#) in the [games exercises self-control](#) in [all things](#). They [then](#) do it to [receive a perishable wreath](#), but we an [imperishable](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [pas de o agonizomenos](#) (PMPMSN) [panta egkrateuetai](#), (3SPMI) [ekeinoi men oun hina phtharton stephanon labosin](#), (3PAAS) [hemeis de aptharton](#).

**Amplified:** Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we [do it to receive a crown of eternal blessedness] that cannot wither. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Now every athlete in the games practices complete self-discipline. They therefore do so to win a crown that quickly fades away; we do so to win a crown that never fades. ([Westminster John Knox Press](#))

**ESV:** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

**KJV:** 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.

**NET:** Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV:** Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ([NIV - IBS](#))

**NLT:** All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Every competitor in athletic events goes into serious training. Athletes will take tremendous pains - for a fading crown of leaves. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Everyone who participates in the athletic games exercises constant self-control in all things, those, to be sure, in order that they may receive a perishable victor's garland of wild olive leaves to be worn as a crown of victory, but as for us [we engage in Christian service, exercising constant self-control to obtain] a victor's garland which is imperishable.

**Young's Literal:** and every one who is striving, is in all things temperate; these, indeed, then, that a corruptible crown they may receive, but we an incorruptible

**EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES EXERCISES SELF CONTROL IN ALL THINGS: pas de o agonizomenos (PMPMSN) panta egkrateuetai (3SPMI):**

- **Competes:** Eph 6:12, 13,14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 1Ti 6:12 2Ti 2:5, 2Ti 4:7 Heb 12:4
- **Exercises self control:** Ga 5:23 Titus 1:8 Titus 2:2 2Pe 1:6
- [1 Corinthians 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**NOTE: BE SURE TO CHECK THE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THIS VERSE BY CLICKING HERE**

### **RUNNING TO WIN: THE REQUIREMENTS...**

- 1 Cor 9:24 - Determination
- 1 Cor 9:25 - Discipline
- 1 Cor 9:26 - Direction
- 1 Cor 9:27 - Denial

**Everyone who competes in the games** - **Everyone** means all athletes without exception. They all agonize as they train in anticipation of the day of the race. Beloved, Paul is saying "all believers" (**everyone**) in their spiritual life, need to emulate the pattern of these ancient athletes. This call is not just in the life of a few "super saints", but is for every man and woman who has been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light. To be sure believers are to walk in the light but in the context of 1Co 9:24-27 Paul calls us to "run" in the light of the coming awards ceremony (2Co 5:10-note). This coming ceremony should prompt a sense of urgency in all of us for "the hour has come for you (plural = church) to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand." (Ro 13:11-note, Ro 13:12-note)

**William Barclay** observes that "There can be little doubt that, in Corinth and in Ephesus, Paul had been a spectator of the games. Where there were crowds of men, Paul would be there to seek to win them for Christ. But, apart from the preaching, there was something about these athletic contests which found an answer in the heart of Paul. He knew the contests of the boxers (1Co 9:26-note). He knew the foot-race, most famous of all the contests. He had seen the herald summoning the racers to the starting-line (1Co 9:27-note); he had seen the runners press along the course to the goal (Php 3:14-note); he had seen the judge awarding the prize at the end of the race (2Ti 4:8-note, 2Co 5:10-note, Ro 14:10-note); he knew of the victor's laurel crown and of his exultation (1Co 9:24-note; Php 4:1-note). He knew the rigorous discipline of training which the athlete must undertake, and the strict regulations which must be observed (1Ti 4:7, 8-note; 2Ti 2:5-note). ([Daily Study Bible](#))

**Competes in the games** (75) (**agonizomai** [**word study**] from **agon** [**word study**] = conflict or the place of assembly for the athletic contests and then a reference to the contests which were held there. English words = agony, agonize, agonal) means to exert oneself, to fight, to labor fervently, to **strive** (devote serious effort or energy = implies great exertion against great difficulty and suggests persistent effort), to struggle, to contend as with an adversary - all of these actions picture an intense struggle for victory.

**Agonizomai** was a familiar term in writings of both military and athletic endeavors and was used to emphasize the concentration, discipline, conviction, and effort needed to win in both arenas. It pictures a runner straining every nerve to the uttermost towards the goal. **Agonizomai** was used in secular Greek meaning to **contend** for the prize on the stage, both of the poet, etc., and of the actor. **Agonizomai** was used in secular Greek in the context of public speaking meaning to **contend against**, as law-term, to **fight** a cause to the last and to **fight** against a charge of murder.

**Agonizomai** is in the **present tense** which continual competition in the race. Inherent in the meaning of this word is the fact that a race implies hindrances, and this is certainly true in the Christian life. It takes courage and expenditure of great effort to run the Christian race with endurance to the end, remembering that the Christian runner's effort is ultimately supplied by the grace of God and the Spirit of God (1Cor 15:10, Php 2:12-note, Php 2:13-note; Zech 4:6).

Paul's entire life had been given fully to the struggle even as Olympic athletes give their body, mind and spirit full to their specific sport. Paul thus engaged in a ceaseless, strenuous conflict, wrestling with Satan and his minions, with evil men (2Ti 2:17, 18, 3:5, 13, 4:14-See **notes** 2Ti 2:17; 18; 3:5; 13; 4:14), with "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ep 6:12-note) and his own **flesh** writing that "I buffet my body and make it my slave" (1Co 9:27). For more on the believer's 3 major "impediments" to our "spiritual race" see discussion of (1) the **world**, (2) the **flesh** and (3) the **devil**. How is it possible for believers to run and become victorious in this lifelong race? It is not possible in our natural ability, but necessitates dependence on God's supernatural provision (see Ezek 36:27, Ga 5:16-note, Ga 5:17-note, Ga 5:18-note, Ga 5:22, Ga 5:23-note, Ga 5:25-note, Eph 5:18-note)

If you want to see the real meaning of **agonizomai**, take a moment to watch an afternoon football practice in the heat of an August day in Texas, where it might be 100 degrees (in the shade!). **Keith Krell** writes that we need to... watch the young athletes sweating under the hot sun. Clad in heavy clothes, padding, and a helmet, their faces grimace with distress and even pain. If they did this because their lives were threatened we might understand. What is difficult to grasp is that they do this voluntarily. All for a trophy that will be kept in a glass case and soon forgotten in this life and most assuredly not remembered in the next. They voluntarily wanted to play, and they will torture themselves in order to win. Now if athletes are willing to undergo this type of discipline and self-control, how much more so should we as servants of Jesus Christ? For unlike the athletic crown, our victor's crown will affect us forever and ever. Paul states that our reward is "imperishable"—it is eternal! This means it does matter whether we gain or lose the prize. Hearing Jesus say "Well done!" is no small matter. Think about that for just a moment. Only what you and I do for Jesus Christ will last. And it will last and last and last. Forever is a long time. And we only have 70 or 80 years to invest in eternity. That is why I pray like Jonathan Edwards, "Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs!" We must run and fight for the prize, for living for God's approval requires finishing well. I realize that very few people would say self-control is one of their greatest strengths.<sup>12</sup> Yet, Paul tells us that self-control is necessary if we are to win the prize. So may I ask you: In what area(s) of your life do you need to exercise self-control? Do you need to exercise self-control in your media intake? Do you watch too much TV? Do you play too many video games? Do you surf the web for too many hours? Do you need to exercise self-control in your leisure? Do you spend too much time working out? Does your hobby come in the way of your relationship with God and your family? Do you need to exercise self-control in your friendships? Are your friends more important to you than your God? Are your friends keeping you from being all that God wants you to be? Do you need to exercise self-control over an addiction? Is food a drug to you? Are you a Christian glutton? Do you drink or smoke too much? Are you addicted to sleep? Do you need to repent for laziness? Paul says, "NO" to flabby Christianity! The Christian life demands discipline! Now again, let me clarify that the Christian life is NOT a race to achieve entrance into heaven. We are saved by grace, not by effort or discipline or obedience or good works or anything else we do. We are saved by believing, not by achieving. We are saved for good works, not by good works. Still, the Christian life is a race, a race to accomplish what God put us here for, a race to present ourselves approved unto God, a race to finish in a way so as to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Living for God's approval requires finishing well. (Read his complete message [Living for God's Approval](#))

**Exercises self control** (1467) (**egkrateuomai** from **egkrates/enkrates** [**word study**] = self-controlled <> In turn from **en** = in + **kratos** [**word study**] = power from the stem **krat-** denoting power or lordship) means literally to control the strength of and thus depicts one who exercises power to "hold oneself in" or to "master self". This virtue describes "lordship" or dominion over self. The self-controlled individual exercises restraint

over his own impulses, emotions, appetites and desires.

This verb is used only 4 times in the Bible...

Genesis 43:31 Then he (Joseph) washed his face and came out; and he **controlled** Heb = aphaq = to hold, to be strong, to be controlled or restrained; Lxx = egkrateuomai) himself and said, "Serve the meal."

1 Samuel 13:12 therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced (Heb = aphaq = to hold, to be strong, to be controlled or restrained; Lxx = egkrateuomai) myself and offered the burnt offering."

1 Corinthians 7:9 But if they do not **have self-control**, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games **exercises self-control** in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

**Self control** (Webster, et al) = the ability to exercise restraint or control over one's feelings, emotions, reactions, behavior, etc especially in difficult situations, curbing one's impulses for the sake of worthier ends.

**Synonyms** = calmness, cool, coolness, restraint, self-discipline, self-mastery, self-restraint, strength of mind or will, willpower, self-command.

#### **Related Resources:**

- [Temperance/Self-Control - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament \(Definition of temperance\)](#)
- [Self-Control - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Self-Control - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#)

Why is self control so crucial to success in our spiritual race? After all we're free now in Christ. We're free from the penalty and power of sin. Yes, we are free but freedom without self-control has the potential to lead to spiritual disaster.

**Exercises self control in all things** - Obviously, in running a race, one must compete, and this required strict training. The exercise of **self-control** by necessity calls for **self-denial**. Stated another way, self-control is crucial to victory. This instruction on racing to win in 1Co 9:24-27 is followed by 1Corinthians 10:1-13 in which Paul asked his readers to remember what had happened to Israel in the wilderness, because of their choosing to invoke their personal freedom instead of seeking self-control. As an aside, it is relatively easy to deny **things**, but it is very costly to deny **self**. In fact, many deny things (it's called "legalism") as a substitute for the real sacrifice God wants, which is the denial of our self! Do not be deceived!

**In all things** (3956) (**pas**) means just that "everything". When one is focused on the "Games" and determined to win, no cost is too great to pay, no "luxury" is off limits. Anything and everything that impede progress in training and achieving the goal of the perishable prize. Paul is setting the bar very high - if pagans passionately pursue a passing prize, how much more focused, zealous and determined should the people of God pursue the things above and not the things of this passing earth! (Col 3:1, Col 3:2) Successful secular athletes like those who would aspire to be "successful Christian athletes", had to exhibit self-denial, self-control and self-discipline, in order to assure maximum performance. As "Christian athletes" we do not have the right to give up our freedom, for that right was purchased by Christ, but we do have the freedom to give up our rights.

**Expositor's Greek** - "But every combatant is temperate in everything—they, to be sure, that they may win a perishable garland; but we an imperishable." The stress in the first clause lies on "all things"—no competitor can afford to be self-indulgent in anything; in the second on ekeinoin hemeis—if they are so abstinent for so poor a prize, what should we be? For ten months before the contest in the Great Games, the athletes were required, under oath, to follow a prescribed diet. ([1 Corinthians 9 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

British statesman Edmund Burke once made an interesting comment that "men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put mural chains on their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there is without. **It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.** (Imprimis, Vol. 20, #9)

**Pulpit Commentary** "One good moral result which sprang from the ancient system of athleticism was the self-denial and self-mastery which it required. The candidate for a prize had to be pure, sober, and enduring (Horace, 'Ars Poet.', 412), to obey orders, to eat sparingly and simply and to bear effort and fatigue (Epict., 'Enchir.', 35) for ten months before the contest.

**What exercising self control is NOT** ([see note below](#)) - It is **not** subjecting one's body to hard treatment as in the practice of asceticism, a severe form of legalism (see Paul's warning in Col 2:23-note). It is not abstaining from something like food in an

attempt to kill bodily appetites, for it lacks any true godliness or grace, to which it is diametrically opposed. **Richison** emphasizes that "Christianity is not self-induced misery. Fasting, going without food and the ordinary things of life or any system that involves self affliction to gain God's favor, violates the grace of God. Fasting is not wrong. Fasting to gain God's favor is wrong. Jesus did all the suffering necessary. He placated God sufficiently by his death on the cross to gain God's favor. If Jesus won God's favor, we violate him if we independently try to win that favor by ourselves... Denial (enabled by the flesh not the Spirit) arouses desire; grace counteracts the flesh. ([Colossians Commentary - online](#))

One secular writer **Philip Massinger** (The Bondman) said "He that would govern others, first should be the master of himself." Sounds a lot like a proverb. Even a broken clock can be correct twice each day!

**John Piper** - Self-control is saying no to sinful desires, even when it hurts. But the Christian way of self-control is **NOT** "Just say no!" The problem is with the word "just." You don't just say **NO**. You say "NO" in a certain way: You say no by faith in the superior power and pleasure of Christ. It is just as ruthless. And may be just as painful. But the difference between worldly self-control and godly self-control is crucial. Who will get the glory for victory? That's the issue. Will we get the glory? Or will Christ get the glory? If we exercise self-control by faith in Christ's superior power and pleasure, Christ will get the glory. Fundamental to the Christian view of self-control is that it is a gift. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit." ([The Fierce Fruit of Self-Control](#)) **John Piper** references an article in The Journal of Biblical Counseling by Edward Welch ([see below](#))

**Comment** - While Piper's discussion is not wrong, I would submit it lacks one critical element -- emphasis on our need to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18+). Only then can we continually walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16+), which gives us the powerful principle for crushing the fleshly lusts in our heart - "But I say, **walk** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) y the Spirit, and you will not (ABSOLUTELY NOT - IF THE SPIRIT IS WATER, THE DESIRE OF THE FLESH IS OIL - THEY ABSOLUTELY DO NOT MIX!) carry out the desire of the flesh." In addition, when we are filled with the Spirit, we will be more likely to bear the fruit of the Spirit which includes "self-control." (Gal 5:23+)

Below is a devotional from Paul David Tripp which describes a much more Biblical way to JUST SAY NO -- As you read it you will notice the upshot is that "Just say YES" to Jesus and then you will be enabled by the Spirit to "Just say NO" to the flesh. Sadly many Christians have fallen into this trap of "JUST SAY NO." Beloved, the flesh will never say "no" to the flesh! We must continually rely on the Holy Spirit's enabling power. Focusing first on the Spirit, not the flesh, is analogous to **the expulsive power of a new affection** in which we first focusing our eyes and our affections on Jesus and rely on His Spirit, and then the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace! Amen!

**Here is Tripp's devotional from "New Morning Mercies"...**

God calls you to deny yourself and then blesses you with the indwelling Holy Spirit so you have the power to say no. You have called me to say no. Not no to you or no to others, but no to myself. I must say no to selfish desires, wrong thoughts, and dangerous emotions. I must say no to the world's values, sin's temptations, and my desire to control what only God can rule. But left to myself, I have little desire or power to say no. So you have given me exactly what I need. It's the only thing that will solve my problem. You have given me your Spirit. So, when necessary, I am able to say no.

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**Here is an excerpt from Welch's article ([Self-Control: The Battle Against "One More"](#))** - Solomon must have been an American: "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure" (Eccl. 2:10). He tried what many Americans would try if they had the means. If there is a continuum that goes from legalistic, restrained, and ascetic, to licentious, reckless and hedonistic, we live in a society that favors the self-indulgent end of the spectrum. When our desires speak, we listen. As such, we live in particular need of learning the skill of self-control. Think of alcohol and drugs, sex and food, laziness and procrastination. You target a range of struggles that have been common since biblical times. It would seem that each of these calls for self-control. Yet, even though it appears to be the perfect antidote, self-control is not a significant part of our national or even ecclesiastical dialogue. Addicts may feel like they have tried self-control maybe hundreds of times: "Just say No." (SEE PRECEDING NOTE) In fact, they may have tried it so many times that many of them are persuaded that their vain attempts at self-control are the problem, not the solution. The consensus? "I have to give up control to a higher power." Among evangelical Christians, self-control is equally suspect. "Let go and let God" is still a motto by which we live. Our sense is that if change feels like self-effort and hard work, then it is probably legalistic and not animated by the Holy Spirit. Self-control, of course, can feel like hard work. But, given the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse, Internet pornography, bulimia, and a host of other out-of-control experiences, we would be wise to revisit the biblical teaching on self-control. What's the Problem? Whatever you call it, many people are owned by their desires and reckless indulgence. AA calls it "self-will run riot," which is a very apt description. Of the Seven Deadly Sins, three—avarice, gluttony, and lust—are devoted to excesses. In fact, sin itself can be summarized as "I WANT" and "I WANT MORE." Sin is a reckless consumer. Study any country in the world, and you will find greed embedded in its basic institutions. For example, first-world countries fuel

capitalistic economies. One reason capitalism works is that it understands the greediness of the human heart. Societies that use other economic systems encounter the same greediness; it becomes most clearly expressed in the corruption and graft of those who have the power to get more. Such greed is partner to idolatry. Idolatry expresses a heart that wants more. It says that God is not enough, so it looks for satisfaction in other places. As such, at the heart of idolatry is recklessness, and it is not surprising that runaway desires play a part consistently in false worship. For example, when the Hebrews chose idols, the result was “the people were running wild and ... Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies” (Ex. 32:25). Idolatry is especially prominent in the Old Testament, but less so in the New Testament. This does not mean that idolatry became less of a problem in more modern times; instead, the Old Testament theme of idolatry passed the baton to the New Testament themes of lust and sinful desire. This is in keeping with the New Testament’s emphasis on the hidden commitments of the heart rather than the external objects of our affection. In this sense, the New Testament is committed to developing the Tenth Commandment, which is the prohibition against coveting. Notice the sins that are listed in the New Testament: murder, debauchery, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness, orgies (Gal. 5:19–21). These are sins of unchecked desires. They say, “I want everything, and I want it now.” Or, more simply, they say, “That was good, let’s do it again.” ([Self-Control: The Battle Against "One More"](#))

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**Grant Richison** feels that “The New Testament uses “**self-control**” very infrequently because God does not sponsor autonomous self-mastery. Salvation or spirituality by mastery of the **self** is not the Christian way of life... The New Testament does not view self-control as legalistic abstinence. Christianity does not de-sex or empty all desires from the person. But the Christian does maintain self-control and mastery over those desires. We add self-control to knowledge (2Pe 1:6-note). “Self-control” comes from two words: out of and strength. “Self-control” is power. “Self-control” is mastery over our passions so that **we** control our desires and actions. God bestows this power upon us. Idiomatically, “self-control” means to hold oneself in, to command oneself. Self-control then is the mastery of self. We stay in command of our desires and wants. It is the ability to say “no” to self (**Ed**: By first saying “Yes” to Jesus, to God’s Word!). This is the freedom of self-restraint.

### **PRINCIPLE:** **Self-control frees us**

... The Christian life carries certain qualities. Any kind of life is not Christian living. There are certain standards unique to Christianity. It is more than being nice to your neighbors or not breaking the law. Self-control in God’s economy comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christian self-control is not autonomous self-control.

Why do people fail in any sphere of life? People fail in athletics, academics and business because of lack of self-discipline. Lazy people fail in athletics and school. Lazy people will fail spiritually in Christian living. This is why people fail especially in the Christian life. They have little internal power that comes from the Holy Spirit. We live in an undisciplined generation. Young people rebel against all authority. Much of their music revolves around that rebellion. They come from undisciplined homes and schools. They go to university and the theme of thought is rebellion against authority—whether it is the authority of rule or the authority of concepts. Some people never accept authority, even police authority. In fact, the only places where discipline remains today is in sports and the military. Sadly, there is little authority left in the home, the school or even the church. The Christian who wants to get in shape spiritually must get into the Word. That is where he gets his spiritual muscles. By applying principles to experience, he begins to lose his spiritual flab. Do you restrain yourself or do you indulge yourself? (Grant Richison [2 Peter Commentary](#))

**Grant Richison** in another commentary says “Self-control implies that a Spirit-filled Christians can control their desires. “Self-control” is self-mastery over a person or thing. It is inherent power over the self. Unrestrained flesh indulges the self but a person walking in the Spirit has power to control inner urges than a person walking in the flesh. Biblical self-control is the concentration of the power of the Spirit toward the end of doing God’s will. This goes beyond abstinence or unadulterated power in self. A purpose or end in view is always at the heart of biblical self-control. There is a reason beyond self to deny oneself of something whether it is the control of our tongue or our anger. We watch where we let our eyes fall because we want to please the Lord. ([Galatians Commentary](#))

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**Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary - SELF-CONTROL** — control of one’s actions or emotions by the will. The New Testament teaches that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). The Christian is to be governed by God, not by self.

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**The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary on self-control** - The virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites (Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 9:25; Gal. 5:23; 2Pet. 1:6, where it is named as one of the Christian graces).

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**The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible on self-control** - One of the basic Christian virtues. It is the mastery of self, the exercise of restraint, especially in sensual pleasures. Self-control or temperance is insurance against self-indulgence in immorality, drunkenness, brawling, gossiping, conceit, and greed. In temperance one foregoes excesses in acceptable pursuits, such as eating,

drinking, and conversation... Self-control fortifies the inner person. It builds a wall of defense against destructive forces of evil. The pathetic tragedy of the physically strong Samson was the result of his intemperance in sensual desires. His sexual love for ungodly women decreed his doom (Jdg 14:1, 2-note)... Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ practiced self-control, even though their enemies accused John of having a demon and Jesus of being "a glutton and a drunkard" (Lk. 7:33, 34). John followed a strict course of self-control and abstinence, similar in some respects to that of the Essenes. Though Jesus was sociable and enjoyed feasting with friends, he set the perfect example of self-control. He enjoyed the blessings of nature and humanity, but abstained from sensual pleasures. Self-control, like other Christian virtues, is not easy to maintain. It requires exercise of will and the aid of the Holy Spirit... Self-control is essential for success in the pursuit of any worthy goal (1Co 9:25)... Self-control was constantly in Jesus' teaching, as with reference to murder, sexual lust, swearing, retaliation, hypocrisy, greed, and anxiety (Matt. 5:21-6:34).

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**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia on self-control** - Rendered in the King James Version "temperance" (compare Latin *temperario* and *continentia*)... Self-control was considered one of the chief virtues by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Philo, the Essenes, the Hermetica, and others... The *enkrateia* word-group originally meant "mastery or power over oneself or something"; eventually it came to mean "control over oneself," especially one's desires and actions. The opposite was *akrasia*, "self-indulgence" or "licentiousness" (cf. RSV "rapacity" in Mt. 23:25).

Clearly self-control does not come naturally or by hard effort but is the gift of God through His Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23; 2Ti1:7). Nonetheless the Christian consciously lives out this self-control just as an athlete exercises self-discipline (1Co 9:25-27). There is no ultimate power over self here but only a control granted and sustained by God. This is the primary reason why a concept so central to Greek ethics found such a small place in biblical ethics. "The reason for this is that biblical man regarded his life as determined and directed by the command of God. There was thus no place for the self-mastery which had a place in autonomous ethics" (TDNT, II, 342).

There are two uses of *egkrateuomai* in the **Septuagint (LXX)** (Ge 43:31, 1Sa 13:12 = "forced myself") but the only other NT use of *egkrateuomai* is in the context of explaining why it is better to marry (if one lacks the divine gift of celibacy - cp 1Co 7:7)...

But if they **do not have self-control** (*egkrateuomai*), let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn. (1Co 7:9)

**Comment:** The implication clearly is that God ordained sacrament of marriage is a "protection" and "promoter" of self control! Now, there are two ways **to burn** has been interpreted -- (1) The idea is that lust leads to divine judgment (think the fire of eternal torment - cp Re 20:14-note). (2) The second view seems to fit better with the context, so that if an individual realizes that he does not possess the gift of celibacy, it is preferable for him to marry rather than to continually seethe with lusts which seek self gratification outside of marriage.

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**See related discussion of Self Control** which is ultimately a fruit of **Spirit control!** Here are a few thoughts on self control...

- **How important is self control according to Paul?** Acts 24:25+ "But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."
  - **What is one of the requirements of an elder?** Titus 1:8+ "but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,"
  - What will the "last days" (we're in them now) be characterized by? 2Ti 3:3+
  - **Can you be familiar with the truth of the Bible and still not exhibit self control?** Mt 23:25 Yes truth sets one free, but there is a condition - what is it? Jn 8:31,32. Are you truly abiding in His Word and allowing His Word to abide in you?
  - **Are you having difficulty controlling yourself in regard to sexual lusts? What is God's solution?** 1Co 7:5+ cp 1Pe 2:11+, 1Th 4:3,4+ = "**Know God**" - note that the basic problem leading Gentiles to sexual immorality is the fact that they do not **know God**. So take time to know God in an intimate, experiential way if you are wrestling with self control in this area.
  - **How can a believer manifest self control?** Gal 5:23+, Eph 5:18+ Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, of one who is filled with the Spirit.
- 

**Betz** observes that the placement of self-control

at the end of the list (Gal 5:23+)...is conspicuous and this is certainly intended; it stands in juxtaposition to love (Gal 5:22). The concept of self-control in the present context implies the claim that Christian ethics is the fulfillment not only of the Torah (cf. Gal 5:14), but also of the central demand of Greek ethics. The gift of the Spirit and the 'fruit of the Spirit' reach their climax in the old Greek ideal of self-control.

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**Barclay** says that **self control** "is that great quality which comes to a man when Christ is in his heart, that quality which makes him

able to live and to walk in the world, and yet to keep his garments unspotted from the world. Self-control; the word is *egkrateia* (1466) which Plato uses of self-mastery. It is the spirit which has mastered its desires and its love of pleasure. It is used of the athlete's discipline of his body (1Corinthians 9:25) and of the Christian's mastery of sex (1 Corinthians 7:9). Secular Greek uses it of the virtue of an Emperor who never lets his private interests influence the government of his people. It is the virtue which makes a man so master of himself that he is fit to be the servant of others. It was Paul's belief and experience that the Christian died with Christ and rose again to a life, new and clean, in which the evil things of the old self were gone and the lovely things of the Spirit had come to fruition.

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**Steven Cole** notes that Paul uses *egkrateuomai* "to refer to an athlete who exercises self-control in all things so that he may win the wreath. He doesn't do anything that would hinder him from his goal. An elder (Ed: These words just as easily could apply to all saints) must have control over harmful desires or habits that would interfere with knowing Christ more deeply or with being an effective shepherd of God's flock. He will be disciplined about spending time alone with God in the Word and prayer. (**Egkrates/enkrates**) is the last of the fruits of the Spirit (Ga 5:23-note), which grow in us as we walk daily by means of the Spirit (Ga 5:16-note). ([Learning to Control Yourself](#))

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**Self-control** means mastering one's emotions rather than being mastered by them. Lack of self control played a significant role in abominable words and deeds of the false teachers Peter exposed in chapter 2 of his second epistle.

For speaking out arrogant (Note they have no control over their pride, a sin which goes before destruction Pr 16:18, 18:12, 29:23) words of vanity they (the false teachers continually [present tense]) entice (deleazo) by fleshly desires ("Desires [epithumia] of the flesh", those strong feelings that emanate from the fallen flesh. Notice to what these false teachers make their appeal! The godless flesh), by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome (conquered), by this he is **enslaved** (perfect tense = a permanent state of bondage). (2Pe 2:18-note, 2Pe 2:19-note)

**Comment:** The false teachers in 2 Peter claimed that "**liberty**" was a warrant for **licentiousness** rather than for **life** as it should be lived in the Spirit. These men instead of **self control** were "**sensuality controlled**", enslaved to greed and fleshly desires (lusts). They believed and taught that knowledge freed people from the need to control their passions.

The writer of **Proverbs** alludes to the subject of **self control** writing that

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and **he who rules his spirit**, than he who captures a city. (Proverbs 16:32) ([About Temper](#))

**Comment:** Have you ever tried in your own strength (self effort) to **control** your temper or restrain the desire follow through with a sudden outburst of anger? I have and it might work for a moment, but **Sin** remains crouching at the door of my mind and heart just waiting for the opportunity to "pounce" (cp Ge 4:5, 6, 7), and unfortunately it often does. How difficult is it for us to achieve victory in this area? The writer says that it is easier to gain a victory over a city (and in ancient times these were walled, well fortified cities, totally unlike our modern cities!) then to conquer one's temper! In my own strength I cannot control the overwhelming, powerful, compelling urge to lash out, but the Spirit of the Gentle Shepherd can control it as I yield my "rights" to Him and rest in His sufficiency to enable me to work out my salvation in the area of "Anger Management 101"

**MacDonald (Ref)** adds that "*Peter the Great, although one of the mightiest of the Czars of Russia, failed here. In a fit of temper he struck his gardener, and a few days afterwards the gardener died. "Alas," said Peter, sadly, "I have conquered other nations, but I have not been able to conquer myself! Woe! There, beloved, is a picture of all of us apart from the grace of God (1Cor 15:10) and the controlling fruit of the Spirit of God!"*

In another pithy proverb, Solomon gives a vivid picture... of the danger of the lack of **self-control** writing...

Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit. (Pr 25:28) (See sermon on Pr 25:28 by Robert Morgan - Maturity is Mastering the Secret of Self-Control)

A person without self-control is like a defenseless city,  
always subject to attack and defeat

**Comment:** As alluded to earlier, the city states of those days were walled for protection from marauders. No wall around a city meant no protection. No **self control** by analogy means one is wide open to attack

from the Evil One and the old sinful flesh nature (flesh)! Without self control, they are not able to resist those things that can destroy their lives and the lives of others. Such a man or woman is an easy victim when attacked by tempting desires and impulses. The Bible offers numerous illustrations of those who failed to "build a wall around the city" of their heart and mind, but instead kept the "opened wide the gates" to the wisdom of the world, the flesh and the devil. Woe! Take for example, the sad saga of **Samson** and his self destruction and defeat at the hands of a seductive temptress. (see **notes** Judges 14; Judges 15; Judges 16). Like Samson, we all have the deceptive flesh lurking and waiting for a moment of weakness (we are tired, frustrated with others, disappointed with our circumstances, we have just been successful in some venture be it secular or spiritual, etc) and would do well to heed Solomon's advice (which sadly and paradoxically he himself did not heed, miserably failing to exercise self control, especially in 1Ki 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 5-6, 7, 8-9, 10, 11, 12, 13 - read the last half of the chapter for the wide ranging consequences!)

**Watch** (command to continually "set a guard" as it were) over your heart with all diligence, (Why is this discipline so critically important?), for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23-note) (The **NLT** poignantly paraphrases it "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.*")

Remember that when we take time off from **disciplining ourselves for godliness** we don't remain "static" spiritually, but we begin to drift back toward the subtle, seductive lures of the world, the flesh and/or the devil. Do not be deceived thinking you are "okay" if you are taking a "spiritual hiatus"! In fact, you are in grave danger, for fleshly lusts continually wage war against your soul (1Pe 2:11-note). Paul understood the critical importance of the necessity of maintaining a program of spiritual discipline (under grace of course, not under law - an easy trap to fall into in the area of the spiritual disciplines - read **Ray Stedman's** excellent admonition to be alert to **Legalism** or better yet listen to his **Mp3**) exhorting his young disciple Timothy (and all disciples of all ages)...

**Discipline** (present imperative - not a suggestion but a command to make it your habit gymnazo [the Greek verb for discipline] yourself - working out in "God's gym" of His Word, prayer, fellowship, breaking of bread, etc) yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life (literally "the now life") and also for the life to come (literally "the coming life" = it's already on its way for believers). It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this (the promise which godliness holds forth -- that it may be fulfilled) we labor (intensely toiling to the point of utter exhaustion!) and strive (agonizomai = an intensely struggling for victory or more accurately for believers "from victory", the Victory having been procured for us at Calvary by Christ), because we have fixed our hope (our certainty) on the living God, Who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (1Ti 4:7, 8, 9, 10-see **notes** 1Ti 4:7; 4:8; 4:9; 4:10)

Just as ceasing to exercise physically results in loss of muscle and bone mass, decreased strength and endurance, etc, so too, the same dynamic occurs in the spiritual realm when we cease to discipline ourselves for godliness.

And so the apostle **Peter** encourages believers to **actively seek self-control** as they grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pe 3:18-note - this is a matter of growing to be like Christ, for not one time in the Gospels do we ever see even a hint of Jesus losing His self-control)...

Now for this very reason also, applying (pareisphero) all diligence (spoude), in your faith (pistis) supply (epichoregeo) moral excellence, and in your moral excellence (arete), knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your **self-control**, perseverance (hupomone), and in your perseverance, godliness (eusebeia); 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness (philadelphia), and in your brotherly kindness, love (agape). 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. (2Pe 1:5-9-note)

#### Teen Esteem...

Hold tight rein over three T's—thought, temper, and tongue—and you will have few regrets. (**Ed:** But see Jas 3:8 - so the three T's cannot be subjugated naturally but only Supernaturally!).

**Bob Jones** got it right when it said...

The Christian philosophy is a philosophy of self-denial, self-control, and self-restraint.

The satanic philosophy is a philosophy of "live as you please," "have what you want," "don't let anyone tell you what to do," and "it's your life, you have a right to live it."

**Jerry Bridges** maintains that...

It is impossible to be a follower of Jesus without giving diligent attention in our lives to the grace of **self-**

**control...** (and adds that) There is a form of **self-control** that says 'yes' to what we should do as well as that which says 'no' to what we shouldn't do.

A New Testament concept which is closely related to **self control** is **sobriety**. For example Paul writes to the saints at Thessalonica encouraging them...

so then let us (note that Paul includes himself!) not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and **sober** (nepho - word study). (1Th 5:6+)

**Comment:** "The idea of "sober" is to be free from excess and imprudence. This well-balanced and self-controlled person is circumspect about God's viewpoint on life. A sober person refrains from carnality. When it comes to spiritual things, a believer must be in control of his thought processes and freedom from irrational thinking. Self-control is at the core of spiritual strength. Christians need to know how to restrain and moderate themselves." ([Ref](#))

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In a sermon by **Steven Cole** he addresses the question **WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?**

**Self-control** is the inward rule or regulation of every area of your life under the ultimate authority and control of God's Spirit in line with His Word. The Greek word comes from a root word meaning power or lordship. The Jewish writer, Philo, described it as having superiority over every desire (Walter Grundmann, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel [Eerdmans], 2:340-341). In our text, it stands in opposition to the deeds of the flesh, which are (Gal. 5:19, 20, 21-note), "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these." Paul lists "self-control" as a qualification for elders (Titus 1:8-note). Peter includes it in his list of godly qualities that we must develop (2Pe 1:6-note). By definition, self-control means overruling your emotions because of a higher goal. Because you want to please and honor God, you must go against your feelings of the moment.

### **1. Self-control is primarily inward and only secondarily outward.**

Jesus said (Mark 7:21, 22, 23+), "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." It follows that if we only control such evil desires in order to look good in front of people or to avoid being prosecuted by the law, we are just putting a Band-Aid on the cancer of the heart. The control of the Holy Spirit extends to the heart level, allowing us to deal with temptation before it goes any farther.

### **2. Self-control operates under Spirit-control.**

There is a paradox here: to be Spirit-controlled results in being self-controlled. As we walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-note), He produces in us the ability to control every area of our lives in line with His holy purposes. This implies active responsibility on your part. Sometimes, speakers on the spiritual life state that you are to be completely passive: "Just let go and let God." "If you're striving, you're not trusting." This is clearly unbiblical. Paul wrote (Col 1:29-note), "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Both are true. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

### **3. Self-control is not self-willed, but it is connected with your will.**

In Titus 1:8, Paul says that an elder is to be self-controlled, but in the previous verse, he says that an elder must not be self-willed. Clearly, both are connected with our responsibility to choose (our will). But the difference is, the self-controlled person is submitting himself to God's will as revealed in His Word, whereas the self-willed person is acting for his own selfish desires, disregarding what God wills. Because God has given us new life in Christ and has given His Holy Spirit to indwell us, we have both the responsibility and the ability to yield our self-will to His revealed will.

### **4. Self-control is not legalism.**

If you develop this fruit of the Spirit, some Christians will label you as legalistic. But this quality appears in the Book of Galatians, which was written to combat legalism. Legalism is the attempt to earn standing with God by performing certain duties or behavior. Also, legalists attempt to look spiritual to others by keeping their man-made rules and they judge those who do not keep their rules. To live as a godly Christian, you must live openly before God, who examines the heart (1Th 2:4-note). Living under God's grace, by the way, does not mean that God gives you a bunch of free passes on sin each day, or that you can live a, hang-loose, sloppy, unproductive life. Paul wrote (1Co 15:10), "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me

did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them [the other apostles]; yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

### **5. Self-control is not asceticism.**

Asceticism means denying yourself certain legitimate comforts and imposing certain hardships for some spiritual value. Join a monastery where you eat a meager diet, sleep on a hard mat in a cold room, and take a vow of poverty in order to control the flesh. Paul describes that approach (Col 2:20, 21, 22-note) and concludes (Col 2:23-note), “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

At the same time, Paul does mention the example of an athlete, who exercises self-control in all things in order to win (1Co 9:25). He goes on to say that he disciplines his body so that he will not be disqualified from preaching the gospel. Thus your motive for controlling yourself is crucial. For example, a missionary to the Muslims may not eat pork, because to do so would be a needless offense to Muslims. But not to eat pork because you think it will make you more spiritual would be asceticism.

### **6. Self-control is not rigid, but flexible.**

There is the danger of being so self-controlled that you lose the ability to relate spontaneously to others in love. For example, it is good to be disciplined to read your Bible and pray every day. But suppose you're in the middle of your quiet time, and your two-year old exuberantly jumps into your lap to show you his picture that he colored for you. I would suggest that you are not properly self-controlled under the Spirit's control if you push him away, saying, “Can't you see that I'm reading the Bible!” The fruit of self-control is also accompanied by the fruits of love, patience, kindness, and gentleness. The aim of self-control is always to enable us to love God and to love others. If we use self-control merely for selfish purposes, we are not exercising this fruit of the Spirit.

### **HOW DO YOU GET SELF-CONTROL?**

Some, by natural temperament and perhaps by upbringing, are more inclined to self-control than others are. If you are not so inclined, then you will have to fight harder to develop it. Paul does not say that those who by nature are more free-spirited or disorganized are exempt from this quality! A study of both Paul and Jesus will show that they exhibited this fruit. To be godly, you must be self-controlled. In one sentence:

You get self-control by walking in the Spirit's control  
as you live in accordance with God's purpose for your life.

Here is how to implement this step by step:

#### **1. Write a one-sentence purpose statement for your life.**

Granted, there is no verse in the Bible that specifically tells you to do this. But many verses show that Jesus and Paul both were clear about their purpose for living. Consider:

Matthew 6:33+: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Luke 19:10+: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

John 17:4: “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”

1 Corinthians 9:23+: “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Philippians 3:8+, Php 3:12b+: “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

1 Timothy 4:7b+: “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

These and many other verses show that Jesus and Paul were men of godly purpose. Picture yourself on your deathbed and ask, what do you want to have accomplished with your life?

Here is my personal purpose statement: “To glorify God by being a godly husband and father, and by using my gift of pastor-teacher for the building up of the body of Christ and the furtherance of the gospel.”

Every Christian will desire to glorify God. Beyond that, your statement will vary, depending on your personality

and gifts. But write it down and look at it often, so that you are clear on why God has you on this earth.

## **2. Establish biblical goals for every area of your life to help move you towards your life purpose.**

Paul illustrates this with the analogy of an athlete who wants to win (1Co 9:24, 25, 26, 27). To get to that goal, he brings every area of his life under that purpose. He controls his diet, he gets the proper rest, and he schedules regular workouts to move him towards the goal of winning the prize.

Again, this will vary with each person, depending on where you most need to grow. You should determine these goals from the Bible, not from some worldly self-help book. They will include biblical character qualities that you need to develop, and biblical activities that you need to practice. Your goals should include developing loving relationships, properly managing your time and money in light of God's purposes, and being a good steward of the spiritual gifts that He has given you. Write down your goals.

## **3. Commit yourself to these goals.**

Biblical goals provide the motivation to change, but you must count the cost and be willing to commit yourself to them. I've often wished that I could speak a foreign language, but I've never committed myself to achieve that goal. As you know, there are no easy ways to learn a language. It takes time and discipline to do it well. Before you commit to some spiritual goal, think about what it will require and whether you are willing to commit to follow through. Your motive has to be to please God.

## **4. Plan specifically how to reach these goals.**

You need to prioritize and schedule your goals. If your marriage is falling apart because you have a bad temper, you should make controlling your temper a top goal! If your life is dominated by drug or alcohol abuse, you can't begin to glorify God until you get those sinful practices under control. Prioritize them!

Also, you must rearrange your schedule to put these new priorities in place. It will mean getting up in time to spend time in the Word, in Scripture memory, and in prayer. It may mean scheduling a weekly time to meet with a small group for growth and accountability. It may mean breaking off certain harmful habits that pull you down, whether ungodly friendships at the local bar or watching TV shows that defile you. You may have to limit computer use.

## **5. Implement, evaluate, and correct your goals as necessary.**

Put your plan into action and then take a few minutes every week or two to evaluate your progress and make necessary corrections. You may decide that some of your original goals need to be modified or changed altogether. When you get certain things into place as godly habits, you can add new goals.

## **6. Walk by means of the Holy Spirit every day.**

**This undergirds the whole process.** Note Galatians 5:16, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." He goes on to talk about the strong desires of the flesh that war against the Spirit. If you do not conquer these desires, you will not grow in godliness. You don't win wars accidentally! You must devote yourself to the battle, committed to fight with everything you've got. Anything less will result in defeat.

**To walk by the Spirit means to depend upon and yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit moment by moment every day.** Walking is not as spectacular as leaping or flying, but if you keep at it, you'll get where you're going. Also, the picture of fruit implies a slow, deliberate process. There will be setbacks and difficulties along the way. The question is, are you actively, purposefully walking by the Spirit, coming back to dependence on Him when you have fallen, so that over the long haul, the fruit of the Spirit, including self-control, is growing in your life?

### **WHERE DO YOU NEED SELF-CONTROL?**

If you haven't been convicted yet, this ought to do it! In a nutshell, You need self-control in every aspect of your life. Let me briefly mention seven areas. Rather than being overwhelmed because you need to improve in all seven, prayerfully evaluate where you most need to grow and prioritize these.

## **1. Control your body.**

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and you are to glorify God with your body (1Co 6:19-note, 1Co 6:20-note). This includes getting proper rest (avoiding the extremes of laziness and being a workaholic). It

means getting proper exercise and eating a healthy diet of moderate proportions, so as to avoid the problems that come from eating junk food and being overweight. This will vary from person to person, but none of us can do it without self-control. Controlling your body also requires godly control over your sexual desires. God made you with those desires, but He also designed them to be restricted to the marriage relationship.

## **2. Control your mind.**

Our culture, more than any other in history, bombards us through the media with ungodly ways to think and live. To be godly, you must control your mind (Php 4:8-note; Col. 3:1-note, Col 3:2-note, Col 3:3, 4-note). What do you think about? You cannot engage in a secret life of lust after sex or greed and become godly. To control your thought life, control what you read. Saturate your mind with the Bible and with books that help you grow in godliness. Set some goals, such as reading through the Bible in a year, or reading a certain number of Christian books this year. Put these things in your schedule. Control what you expose your mind to (TV, movies, Internet, etc.). You cannot watch certain types of movies without those evil images embedding themselves in your brain.

## **3. Control your emotions.**

You are not the helpless victim of your emotions! If you are genetically prone to depression or anxiety or impulsiveness or lust, you may have to battle harder to gain control than someone else will. But these fruits of the Spirit are promised to all that walk by the Spirit, not just to certain personality types. If you live by constantly yielding to your emotions, you will not grow in godliness. Self-control means controlling your emotions for a higher goal.

## **4. Control your time.**

Often we excuse our ungodliness by saying, "I don't have time." But we all have time to do what we want to do. The question is, do you want to be godly? If so, cut out of your schedule the unnecessary things that hinder spending time with the Lord.

## **5. Control your finances.**

We often complain that we don't have enough money to pay bills, let alone to give consistently to the Lord's work. But usually the problem is that we do not properly manage what the Lord has entrusted to us. Let me put it bluntly: Cable TV, dinners out, and expensive entertainment are not necessities! If you can pay your bills and give generously to the Lord's work, those things may be permissible. Unless you need it for work, believe it or not, a cell phone is not a necessity! Running up credit card debt is almost always due to poor financial management.

## **6. Control your tongue.**

Abusive speech or words that tear down others (even in jest) are sinful (Col 3:8-note). Angry words and name-calling are sins (Ep 4:29, 30-note, Ep 4:31, 32-note). Lying is sin (Ep 4:25-note). Talking inappropriately about sex and telling dirty jokes are sins (Ep 5:3, 4-note). Gossip and slander are sins (Ep 4:31-note; Jas 4:11). Taking the Lord's name in vain is sin (Ex 20:7; Mt. 6:9-note). Paul wrote (Eph. 4:29-note), "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." To please God, you must learn to control your tongue (Jas 3:1-12).

## **7. Control your relationships.**

I **do not mean** to act in a controlling manner towards others! I mean that you must take the initiative to distance yourself from anyone that pulls you towards the world or the flesh. Be careful about relationships with unbelievers, especially those that yoke you unequally, whether in marriage or in business (2Co 6:14, 15,16, 17, 18, 7:1-note). If you are single, do not date unbelievers, even to witness to them. If you develop friendships with unbelievers, be careful to keep in mind the aim of being a godly witness, so that you do not join them in godless pleasure (Lk 5:29, 30, 31, 32; 1Pe 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5-note). Positively, work on developing godly, loving relationships, beginning with your mate and children. Practice biblical love on a daily basis. Ask God for a more mature person (men with men, women with women) who can help you grow in Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The danger of a message like this is that you will feel so overwhelmed by all that you need to do that you will

be paralyzed by procrastination. My advice is to pray through the areas that I've mentioned, asking God to help you prioritize them. Work on the one or two areas that would bring the most needed results. If you fall, get up and keep walking by the Spirit. As you do, He will work in you the fruit of self-control for His glory. ([Learning to Control Yourself](#))

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**James** speaks to an aspect of self-control when he promises that...

Blessed is a man who perseveres (self control must be persevered in - cp 2Pe 1:6-note) under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (Jas 1:12-note)

**Comment:** James 1:14-note goes on to explain how temptation (which can be external but can also come from within, from our **flesh**) acts like a lure which seeks to draw us away from the safety of **Spirit enabled self-control**. Temptation prods and baits us by appealing to our fallen **flesh**.

**Jesus** addressing the church at **Smyrna** declared...

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10-note)

**Jesus** addressing the church at **Philadelphia** declared...

I am coming quickly; **hold fast** (present imperative = command calling for continual retention) what you have, in order that no one take your crown. (Rev 3:11-note)

### TO REITERATE...

Paul is saying that if the Olympic and Isthmian athletes could exercise such great discipline (giving up the good and the better for the best) and self-control in **all** things (Notice the word "**all**" -- Do you have any "pet sins" that are off limits? Are you treating your "besetting sin" as a friend or as what it truly is -- your mortal enemy that may masquerade as a source of gratification but in truth brings only death!), why can't you Corinthian Christians (Why cannot you and I dear reader)? In this same line of thought we need to remember that Jesus didn't say, "Follow Me and life will be easy." He said, "Follow Me, and life will be tough, but your prize will be worth it in the end." (See Mk 8:34, 35, 36+) The Christian life is not a race to see who comes in first, but an endurance run to see who finishes faithfully. Remaining faithful to the finish makes us true winners. We are judged by how we finish, not by how we start.

**May God give us His Spirit and His grace  
to enable us to run to win the race,  
for His glory, through His Son. Amen.**

Beloved after studying 1Cor 9:24-27 you may be having one or more of the following reactions -**Conviction, Apprehension, Despair** - if so see [sermon Playing to Win by Bruce Goettsche](#).

**SELF CONTROL  
SELF DENIAL  
SPIRIT FILLED**

**Self Control** is virtually synonymous with **Self Denial** - For believers this must be grace grounded, Spirit enabled denial or "**Spirit filled Self Denial**" ("**Spirit filled Self Control**"). The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Continual dependence on Jesus is simply the only way to success in "all things" (1Co 9:25). As George Sweeting put it "The secret of a governable tongue is not **self-control** but **Christ-control**." Try to control yourself when the temptation to commit that "besetting sin" feels like it is going to absolutely overwhelm you! The Bible says "quit trying" and "start dying" but don't try to accomplish it "legalistically" but gracefully (grace filled)! That said here is Torrey's compilation of passages that have to do with "Self Denial" - I would make an interesting Sunday School lesson - simply observing the passages by interrogating them with the "who, what, where, why, when, and how" type questions, making of a list of your observations and finish up by praying based on the truth that the Spirit reveals. Just hand out the verses, not Torrey's comments - you can use his insights as an aid if folks are having difficulty with a given passage. It should be an edifying and equipping time! Here's the list...

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## SELF-CONTROL

**Examples of self-control**

- Jacob: Ge 34:5
- Joseph: Ge 39:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
- David: 1 Sa 24:7, 10, 18, 19; 2Sa 16:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 1Sa 26:1-20
- Job: Job 1:20, 21, 22
- Jesus: Jn 2:13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (cf. Ep 4:26); 1Pe 2:21, 22, 23
- Saul: 1Sa 10:27.

### **Importance of self-control**

- demonstrates wisdom: Pr 29:11
- preached by Paul: Acts 24:25
- emphasized in athletic competition: 1Co 9:25
- encouraged in Christian practice: 1Co 9:25, 26, 27; 2Pe 1:6
- included in the fruit of the Spirit: Ga 5:22, 23
- need to avoid sin: Eph 5:26
- required as a qualification of elders: Titus 1:8
- enjoined for older men: Titus 2:2

### **Lack of self-control**

- in sexual desire 2 Sa 11:1-27, 12:1-14; 1Co 7:5, 9 cf. 1Th 4:3, 4, 5
- over one's spirit: Pr 25:28 (cf. Pr 16:32)
- over one's anger: Eph 4:26
- in the last days: 2 Ti 3:1, 2, 3
- in the conduct of unbelievers: Titus 3:3
- Pharisees (who knew truth - truth doesn't set hypocrites free!) - Mt 23:25

## **SELF DENIAL**

**1. Christ set an example of.** Mt 4:8, 9, 10; 8:20; Jn 6:38; Ro 15:3; Php 2:6, 7, 8.

**2. A test of devotedness to Christ.** Mt 10:37,38; Lk 9:23,24.

### **3. Necessary**

a. In following Christ. Lk 14:27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33.

b. In the warfare of saints. 2Ti 2:4.

c. To the triumph of saints. 1Co 9:25, 26, 27.

**4. Ministers especially called to exercise.** 2Co 6:4,5.

### **5. Should be exercised in**

a. Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. Ro 6:12; Titus 2:12.

b. Controlling the appetite. Pr 23:2.

c. Abstaining from fleshly lusts. 1Pe 2:11.

d. No longer living to lusts of men. 1Pe 4:2.

e. Mortifying sinful lusts. Mr 9:43; Col 3:5.

f. Mortifying deeds of the body. Ro 8:13.

g. Not pleasing ourselves. Ro 15:1, 2, 3.

h. Not seeking out own profit. 1Co 10:24,33; 13:5; Php 2:4.

i. Preferring the profit of others. Ro 14:20,21; 1Co 10:24,33.

- j. Assisting others. Lk 3:11.
- k. Even lawful things. 1Co 10:23.
- l. Forsaking all. Lk 14:33.
- m. Taking up the cross and following Christ. Mt 10:38; 16:24.
- n. Crucifying the flesh. Ga 5:24.
- o. Being crucified with Christ. Ro 6:6.
- p. Being crucified to the world. Ga 6:14.
- q. Putting off the old man which is corrupt. Eph 4:22; Col 3:9.
- r. Preferring Christ to all earthly relations. Mt 8:21,22; Lk 14:26.

**6. Becomes strangers and pilgrims.** Heb 11:13-15; 1Pe 2:11.

**7. Danger of neglecting.** Mt 16:25,26; 1Co 9:27.

**8. Reward of.** Mt 19:28,29; Ro 8:13.

**9. Happy result.** 2Pe 1:4.

#### **10. Exemplified**

- a. Abraham. Ge 13:9; Heb 11:8,9.
- b. Widow of Zarephath. 1Ki 17:12, 13, 14, 15.
- c. Esther. Es 4:16.
- d. Rechabites. Jer 35:6,7.
- e. Daniel. Da 1:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.
- f. Apostles. Mt 19:27.
- g. Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Mr 1:16, 17, 18, 19, 20.
- h. Poor Widow. Lk 21:4.
- i. The Christians. Ac 2:45; 4:34.
- j. Barnabas. Ac 4:36,37.
- k. Paul. Ac 20:24; 1Co 9:19,27.
- l. Moses. Heb 11:24,25.

**A Little Humor** - Self-control is the capacity to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands—and then eat just one of the pieces. Self-control is the ability to keep cool while someone is making it hot for you.

#### **From devotionals by J R Miller**

There is a majestic power in self-control, and we should seek to have that power. Not to be master of our own life—is to be pitifully weak. We should learn to control our feelings, our emotions, our appetites, our passions, our desires, our temper, our speech. He who rules his own spirit, is the greatest of conquerors, greater than he who captures a city. No doubt perfect self-mastery has much to do with keeping the heart quiet in danger, calm and undisturbed in sudden trial. ([In Perfect Peace](#))

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It seemed but a little sin that Moses had committed. He was terribly tried by the people's rebelliousness, lost his patience and **self-control**, and spoke unadvisedly. And his slip—cost him his entrance into the Promised Land. We cannot tell what a moment's loss

of **self-control** may cost us. ([Numbering Our Days](#))

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Another step in the school of forbearance is the lesson of keeping silent under provocation. One person alone can never make a quarrel: it takes two. A homely counsel to a newly-married couple was that they should never both be angry at the same time—that one should always remain calm and tranquil. There is a still diviner counsel, which speaks of the soft answer, which turns away wrath. If we cannot have the soft answer always ready, we can at least learn not to answer at all. Our Lord met nearly all the insults He received with patient uncomplaining silence. He was like a lamb silent before the shearer. All the keen insults of the cruel throng wrung from Him no word of resentment, no look of impatience. As the fragrant perfume but gives forth added sweetness when crushed, so cruelty, wrong, and pain only made Him the gentler and the love that always distinguished Him the sweeter.

It is a majestic power, this power of keeping silent. Great is the conqueror who leads armies to victories. Mighty is the strength that captures a city.

But he is greater  
who can rule his own spirit.

There are men who can command armies, but cannot command themselves. There are men who by their burning words can sway vast multitudes who cannot keep silence under provocation or wrong. The highest mark of nobility is **self-control**. It is more kingly than regal crown and purple robe. ([MUTUAL FORBEARANCE](#))

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**Running Well** — A computer study of 5,000 racehorses has revealed a way to predict whether or not a young horse will develop into a good runner. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used computers and high-speed cameras to find out how a good horse runs. He discovered that the legs of a fast horse operate much like the spokes of a wheel. Each leg touches down only as the leg before it pushes off. The effect is peak efficiency of effort and speed.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about running well in the course of life. He said that the person who runs the best is the one who learns to “wait on the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31). He doesn’t waste energy trying to do things on his own. He looks to the Lord for his strength and hope.

In the New Testament, the Christian life is likened to a race. The apostle Paul indicated that those who run well are characterized by self-control and self-discipline (1Corinthians 9:24-27). The author of Hebrews said, “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” (Hebrews 12:1).

Do you want to earn an imperishable crown? Then wait on the Lord. Practice self-control. Lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well. — Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To run the race of life in Christ,  
This must become your daily goal:  
Confess your sins, trust God for strength,  
Use discipline and self-control. —Sper

**Those who wait on the Lord  
run without the weight of sin.**

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**Your Biography** —When D. L. Moody was moving into old age, he was asked to grant permission for his biography. Moody refused, saying, “A man’s life should never be written while he is living. What is important is how a man ends, not how he begins.”

For better or worse, I have failed to follow that dictum. My biography has been published. Yet I agree with Moody that the way our lives end is the crucial test of authentic discipleship. Only if we remain in a steadfast relationship with the Savior can we be confident not merely of entering heaven, but of obtaining the victor’s crown (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Paul was concerned about the possibility of being disapproved by his Lord (v.27). He was a redeemed believer who was serving the Lord, yet he feared that his service might prove to be wood, hay, and straw rather than gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

What will be the Lord’s appraisal of our lives? Will someone evaluating us be able to say honestly that we continued to bear fruit in

old age? (Psalm 92:14). Whatever vocation we pursue, with the help of the Holy Spirit we may be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1Corinthians 15:58). — by Vernon C. Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful,  
May the fire of our devotion light their way;  
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey. —Mohr  
© 1987 by Jonathan Mark Music and Birdwing Music (ASCAP)

**For the ignorant, old age is as winter;  
for the learned, it is a harvest. —Jewish proverb**

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**True Teamwork** - Sports brings out the best and the worst in people. The news media often focus on the worst. Those who comfort players with “It’s not whether you win or lose that counts; it’s how you play the game” seldom make world news. But once in a while they do.

After a baseball team from Georgia defeated a team from Japan in the Little League World Series, one reporter wrote: “The boys from Warner Robins left a lasting impression of their inner character for the world to see. They proved again, it’s not whether you win or lose that counts. It is, how you play the game.”

When the losing players broke down in tears, the winning team members stopped their victory celebration to console them. “I just hated to see them cry,” said pitcher Kendall Scott, “and I just wanted to let them know that I care.” Some referred to the moment as “sportsmanship at its best.”

It was indeed heartwarming, but it points out that sports—even at its best—is an imperfect metaphor for Christianity. In sports, someone always loses. But when someone is won to Christ, the only loser is Satan.

For Christians, true teamwork is not about defeating opponents; it’s about recruiting them to join our team (1Co 9:19, 20, 21, 22). — Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, too often I view as my enemies those who don’t know You. Help me love them as You love them. Help me gently share Your truth with them. Help me see them as part of Your great mission field. Amen.

**Tact is the knack of winning a point  
without making an enemy.**

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In May 1996, 5 foot 7 inch, 118 pound Miss Venezuela won the Miss Universe contest. According to the Chicago Tribune, after her victory reporters asked her what she wanted to do first. “I’m going to do something,” she said, “I haven’t been able to do for three weeks—eat, eat, eat and sleep.” Apparently she kept her word. She quickly gained weight, to the point where pageant officials were complaining. One pageant official explained, “She has various swimsuit contracts, and they’re not happy that she has gone a bit chubby.” She kept on gaining, though. According to People Weekly, by January 1997 a new personal trainer weighed her in at 155 pounds, and at one point she weighed 160 pounds. But with the help of her trainer within a few months she was back down to an ideal weight of 130 pounds. Without ongoing self-discipline how quickly we can squander our accomplishments. Self-control must be a lifestyle, not an occasional event. (Larson, C. B. 750 engaging illustrations for preachers, teachers & writers. 1998. p 498. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books)

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**A W Tozer** wrote...

I am having a hard time trying to comprehend what has happened to sound Bible teaching. What has happened to preaching on Christian discipleship and on our daily deportment in the spiritual life? We are making an accommodation. We are offering a take-it-easy, Pollyanna type of approach that does not seem ever to have heard of total commitment to One who is our Lord and Savior. I regret that more and more Christian believers are being drawn into a hazy, fuzzy kind of teaching that assures everyone who has ever “accepted Christ” that he or she has nothing more to be concerned about. He is OK and he will always be OK because Christ will be returning before things get too tough. Then all of us will wear our crowns, and God will see that we have cities to rule over! If that concept is accurate, why did our Lord take the stern and unpopular

position that Christian believers should be engaged in watching and praying?

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Instant Christianity tends to make the faith act terminal and so smothers the desire for spiritual advance. It fails to understand the true nature of the Christian life, which is not static but dynamic and expanding. It overlooks the fact that a new Christian is a living organism as certainly as a new baby is, and must have nourishment and exercise to assure normal growth. It does not consider that the act of faith in Christ sets up a personal relationship between two intelligent moral beings, God and the reconciled man, and no single encounter between God and a creature made in His image could ever be sufficient to establish an intimate friendship between them. By trying to pack all of salvation into one experience, or two, the advocates of instant Christianity flaunt the law of development which runs through all nature. They ignore the sanctifying effects of suffering, cross carrying and practical obedience. They pass by the need for spiritual training, the necessity of forming right religious habits and the need to wrestle against the world, the devil and the flesh...Instant Christianity is twentieth century orthodoxy. I wonder whether the man who wrote Philippians 3:7-16 would recognize it as the faith for which he finally died. I am afraid he would not. (The Tozer Topical Reader 1:149)

**THEY THEN DO IT TO RECEIVE A PERISHABLE WREATH, BUT WE AN IMPERISHABLE: ekeinoi men oun hina phtharton stephanon labosin, (3PAAS) hemeis de aphtharton:**

- **Imperishable:** 1Co 15:54 2Ti 4:8 Heb 12:28 Jas 1:12 1Pe 1:4 1Pe 5:4 Rev 2:10 Rev 3:11 Rev 4:4,10
- [1 Corinthians 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**They then do it to receive a perishable wreath** - Every athlete has the specific goal which is to win the prize. For ancient Greek athletes this was no small matter as victors received not just a perishable wreath but also received great benefits from their home city for the rest of their lives, including such perks as free meals, invitations to banquets, and specially reserved places in the theatre. It is said that in some cases when a victorious athlete returned to their home cities, their compatriots would pull down part of the walls to allow them to enter. In the ancient games every athlete had to meet three basic rules including being a true-born Greek, swearing an oath before Zeus that he had prepared for ten months before the games (thus giving Zeus liberty to take his life if he lied) and abiding by the rules that applied to his specific event (for example, in wrestling kicking your opponent in the stomach was allowed but gouging one's eyes out was not!). Failure to comply with these rules resulted in immediate disqualification. Paul alluded to this important aspect running to win in the Christian's race...

And also if anyone competes as an athlete (Literally "unless he competes lawfully"), he does not win the prize (Literally = absolutely never being crowned = a serious warning against breaking the rules) unless he competes according to the rules. (2Ti 2:5+)

**Comment:** During the 10 months of required training the Greek Athlete had to engage in the prescribed exercises and live a strictly separated life in regard to the ordinary and lawful pursuits of life, and he was placed on a rigid diet. Should he break training rules, he would be a castaway (1Co 9:27ASV), adokimos "disqualified," barred from engaging in the athletic contest. In 1912 the famous American athlete, Jim Thorpe, won the decathlon and the pentathlon at the Olympic Games in Stockholm. But the next year he had to forfeit his gold medals because it was discovered he had played professional baseball in 1911. He had won the events but had broken the rules, so he lost his prize. At the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles the committee restored his awards. But even this did not alter that fact that Thorpe had broken the rules.

In summary, the prize that is awarded for winning the temporal race will decay and crumble and disintegrate. What a dramatic contrast with the prize awarded to all who run and win the eternal, heavenly race!

**THOUGHT** - Does this great truth not motivate you to lay aside everything that is holding you back from running the race of your life for the eternal prize! You only go around once, says a popular commercial. While you have breath in your lungs, run for the goal (and the "gold" that will not perish) with all your might and all God's grace. You won't regret your decision throughout the ages to come!

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE  
TO BEGIN TO RUN!**

You may be thinking "**But I've lost so much time. It's too late for me run in this race.**" Dearly beloved of God (1Th 1:4-note), if

you are still physically alive, it is not too late to begin to run the race! Clearly though, to run this **spiritual** race you must be born again by the **Spirit** (Jn 3:3, 5, Titus 3:5-note, 1Pe 1:23-note, Acts 26:20). I know a man who began this **great race** in his 60's (his **past** was so dark I dare not even mention it) and he is still running today, some 10 years after I first met him. His "race pace" would put most of us to shame because of his passion and pursuit of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus! This man, like Paul chose to forget what was behind and so too should you! (Php 3:13-note) It is not about where you've been, but about where you are going! Ask God to give you the **will** (the desire, the "want to") to run (Php 2:13-note) and then to spiritually energize your grace race (1Co 15:10) and He will surely give you the desires of your heart (Ps 37:4-note) for they are in accord with His will (1Jn 5:14,15) which is good and acceptable and perfect (Ro 12:2-note). But be careful -- don't think that running your God-appointed "grace race" is about "**doing**" per se, for in truth it is more about "**being**" than **doing**. Pastor Ed Young (Houston) was right when he said "*Being* comes before *doing*. If I'm who I should be (in Christ, abiding in the Vine, Jn 15:5), I'll automatically be doing what I should be doing." If you want to run the race to win, make sure that the **Savior** is increasing and **self** is decreasing (John 3:30-note). Make sure His Spirit is initiating and enabling your "*doing*". Make sure your works are not just "*good*" works but are "*God*" works (see Good Deeds). Finally, make sure your heart is rightly motivated (1Co 4:5), running to win not for your glory, but for the glory and honor of our majestic, awesome God (Ex 15:11, Mt 5:16-note, Ps 115:1-note).

**And then "run" like the wind,  
continually filled with His Spirit**

(Ep 5:18-note)

**Perishable** (5349) (**phthartos** from **phtheiro** = to destroy from **phthino** = waste) is that which is subject to corruption, rot, withering, decay or decomposition. The basic idea is that which is short lived, or that which has a brief life or significance. The ancient crowns or wreaths were composed of olive, apple, parsley, fir, pine or celery (depending on who one reads). Obviously such crowns would undergo decay over time as would even the very memory of the award. What a dramatic contrast with the eternal crown awarded to every Christian who faithfully finishes the race! In the epistle to the Romans Paul describes the danger of rejecting the natural revelation of God (Ro 1:18, 19-note, Ro 1:20, 21-note, Ro 1:22-note) is that man's God created spirit abhors a "spiritual vacuum", the result being that those who reject God end up exchanging..."the glory of the **incorruptible** God for an image in the form of **corruptible** man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:23-note) Later in this same epistle Paul uses contrasts **perishable** and **imperishable** bodies "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound (See 1Th 4:17-note, See also Rapture), and the dead will be raised **imperishable**, and we shall be changed. For this **perishable** must put on the **imperishable**, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1Cor 15:52, 53) Peter explains that believers have not been "redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold" (1Pe 1:18, 19-note) (Are you treating gold as a hedge against inflation? There is nothing wrong with doing that, as long as you remember gold is perishable and you don't fix your hope on it rather than fixing "your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1Pe 1:13-note)! Peter goes on to explain that we "have been born again not of seed which is **perishable** (**phthartos**) but **imperishable** (**aphthartos**), that is, through the living and abiding word of God." (1Pe 1:23)

**Wreath (Crown)** (4735) (**stephanos** from **stepho** = to encircle, twine or wreath) in classical usage originally referred to anything that encircled something else, such as a besieging army or the wall around a city. The usual meaning in secular Greek was a crown or wreath won at various athletic contests. **BDAG** - The **stephanos** was "a wreath made of foliage or designed to resemble foliage and worn by one of high status or held in high regard... Apart from recognition of athletes and winners of various kinds of competitions, in the Greco-Roman world the awarding of a crown or wreath signified appreciation for exceptional contributions to the state or groups within it" In the New Testament **stephanos** is used as a metaphor for the eternal reward of the faithful --1Co 9:25; 2Ti 2:5; Jas 1:12; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 3:11; Re 4:4, Re 4:10. And so we see that the **stephanos** was literally an adornment worn around the head as a crown of victory in the Greek athletic games, this reward being given to the runner who crossed the goal first, to the disc thrower with the longest toss, etc. Apart from recognition of athletes and winners of various kinds of competitions, in the Greco-Roman world, the awarding of a crown or wreath signified appreciation for exceptional contributions to the state or groups within it.

**Stephanos** - 25x in 25v in the NAS - Mt 27:29; Mk 15:17; John 19:2, 5; Acts 6:5, 8f; 7:59; 8:2; 11:19; 22:20; 1 Cor 9:25; Php 4:1; 1Th 2:19; 2Ti 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14

**Imperishable** (862) (**aphthartos** from **a** = negates what follows + **phtheiro** = to corrupt) means nothing can corrupt or ruin, not liable to pass away, not subject to corruption, decay or dissolution and so imperishable.

Absolutely nothing can ruin your eternal crown beloved! In secular Greek **aphthartos** described something that had not been ravaged by an invading army. Our crown is totally unlike any earthly crown awarded at the ancient Olympiad. A Christian's crown cannot be ravaged by hostile forces!

**Aphthartos** - 7x in 7v in the **NAS** - Ro1:23; 1Co 9:25; 15:52; 1Ti 1:17; 1Pe 1:4, 23; 3:4. **NAS** = immortal(1), imperishable(4), imperishable quality(1), incorruptible(1).

**A good resource if you need help with self-control** - I Need Help With My Self-Control by Robert Morgan

**Jerry M. Hullinger** discusses some specific aspects of the ancient **stephanos**...

**The value of the crown.** Because of the hardship athletes endured in order to win a crown that would wither in a short time, the question naturally arises as to whether it was worth the effort employed to win it. Does this not weaken Paul's analogy of the crown in relation to the Christian life? Why refer to a crown as a reward for the believer, if it is short-lived? The answer to these questions lies in the fact that it was not the crown itself that was desired, but rather what the crown represented, for the "stephanos to be won at Olympia had only ideal worth."

**This ideal worth can be seen in the works of classical writers.** For example Herodotus recorded the response to the question of a Persian as to what prize was offered at the various events of the games.

They told him of the crown of olive that was given to the victor. Then Tigranes son of Artabanus uttered a most noble saying... when he heard that the prize was not money but a crown, he could not hold his peace, but cried 'Zounds Mardonius,' what manner of men are these that you have brought us to fight withal? 'Tis not for money they contend but for glory of achievement!

**Dio Chrysostom** also wrote of the honor of the crowns.

For the pillar, the inscription, and being set up in bronze are regarded as a high honor by noble men, and they deem it a reward worthy of their virtue not to have their name destroyed along with their body and to be brought level with those who have never lived at all, but rather to leave an imprint and a token, so to speak, of their manly prowess. You see what hardships these athletic competitors endure while training, spending money, and finally often even choosing to die in the very midst of the games. Why is it? If we were to abolish the crown for the sake of which they strive, and the inscription which will commemorate their victory at the... games, do you think that they would endure for even one day the heat of the sun?

**Also the victors were viewed as having acquired divine status** At the Olympic games leaves of olive trees were cut with a golden sickle from the most sacred olive trees before they were handed to the victor.

"The victors were placed on the same level as the gods and entered into communion with them. This bond was clearly demonstrated in the temple of Zeus in Olympia, for Phildias represented Zeus wearing a crown of wild olive. When the victors were honored they wore the same mark of distinction as the god: a wreath woven from the evergreen branches of a wild olive tree."

**The ceremony of the crown.** On the last day of the games the victors were crowned in an elaborate ceremony. In the morning the victors, judges, and members of the various groups proceeded in a solemn parade to the temple of Zeus, which was observed by all of the spectators who were present at the games. At the temple the judge, wearing a purple robe, placed the crown on the victor's head (**Ed: Can you read this secular description and not be transported to that solemn day in the future when you stand before the "Judge of judges" Christ Jesus, 2Co 5:10-note?**). Made from a single branch, the wreath which signified magical associations, linked the victor with the god at the moment it was placed on his head. This

"was one of the great moments of [the victor's] life—he felt not only the pride and joy of victory but also the sense of pious awe induced by a divine sacrament. Certainly this was the case for as long as the sacred games retained their religious character."

**Possessing this crown signified spiritual, emotional, financial, and social benefits.** Yet as Paul wrote, as grand as this earthly attainment was, it paled in significance when compared to the heavenly reward for the faithful believer (1Co. 9:25). ([The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions - Bibliotheca Sacra 161:643 July 2004](#)) (or [here](#))

**To receive... an imperishable** - Remember that the prize is reward for faithful service and not salvation which is solely a gift of God's grace.

Proud were the mighty conquerors

Crowned in Olympic games;  
They thought that deathless honors  
Were entwined about their names.

But dead was soon the parsley leaf,  
The olive and the bay;  
But Christian's crown of amaranth  
Shall never fade away.  
--Anonymous

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The Christian life is a race, and we are exhorted to run that the prize may be obtained. **“So run.” How?**

**I. Run in the prescribed course.**

The course is marked out and measured. The starting-place is at the foot of the cross, and the goal is planted in the grave.

**II. Run without encumbrance.**

“Lay aside every weight,” all worldly cares, and inordinate sympathetic embarrassing prejudices, and fettering habits.

**III. Run with all possible celerity.**

Shake off sloth and languor, stretch every muscle and limb, throw the whole force of your being into the effort.

**IV. Run with untiring persistency.**

Pause not, nor loiter a moment until the end is obtained. “So run, that ye may obtain.” (The pulpit commentary)-

## 10 Requisites for Success in Spiritual Athletics

**From the Homily on "Spiritual Athletics" -**

**1. Preparation.**

For athletic contests how much “training” has to be undergone, often very painful and wearying! Our preparation for Christian life is arduous and long, but it does not commence before we enter upon Christian life, but as we enter, and continues until the close. We “train” as we run and as we fight.

**2. Earnestness.**

No indifferent competitor was likely to win in ancient races or boxing contests. Indifference kills Christian life. The half-hearted go not far from the starting-point. Many have only enough earnestness to “enter” for the race and fight; as soon as they have “entered,” they think all is done.

**3. Striving.**

To be amongst the runners is not enough; we must exert our powers; we must call into activity all our energies. We must not be as those who “beat the air,” but as those who beat their enemies. Christian life is real, with issues of infinite importance. It is not for exhibition of skill, but for stern work. “Strive [agonize] to enter in at the strait gate.” Paul would have each Christian to be as the winner, who “spent himself” in snatching the victory (ver. 24). We do not hinder others from attaining, and for this we may be not a little thankful; but we each need to use the utmost effort.

**4. Patience.**

Christian life is not soon over. At first we may do well, but when difficulties arise we shall be tested. Some who run fastest at first run slowest at last. Our all-wise Master spoke of “enduring to the end.”

**5. Watchfulness.**

Lest we trip. Lest our enemy gets an advantage. The great Preacher’s text was often “Watch!”

## 6. Resolution.

If we are to endure to the end, we shall need stern resolve. Fixedness of purpose is an essential for Christian life. We should determine in God's strength to go on, whatever may lie in our path: to fight on, no matter what enemies confront us. Christian life demands courage and fortitude; we must not be too easily frightened.

## 7. Concentration.

"This one thing I do." The "whole man" must be given to religion. Some professors are "called off" from the race, and lose it. They lower their guard, for their hands must be about earthly things, and then their enemy overthrows them.

## 8. Continuity.

This tries many. If religion were spasmodic, they could be religious. There are many "now-and-then" Christians. People like to be pious at intervals.

## 9. Mortification of the flesh.

Ancient athletes knew, as their modern brethren do, what this means. The victor was "temperate in all things." A pampered body meant disappointment, disgrace, loss. Paul said, "I keep under [I buffet, I bruise] my body." Our lower nature must be dealt severely with. Indulgence is disaster; we must practise self-control, self-denial, self-sacrifice.

## 10. Confidence, but not excess of confidence.

Confidence that will prompt to exertion, not confidence which kills effort. "Lest...I myself should be a castaway." [The pulpit commentary - Spiritual Athletics](#)

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**The Forbidden Zones** - Donald Kennedy served as one of the most able coastwatchers in the Solomon Islands during the early months of World War II. Based at Segi, on the southern tip of New Georgia, he provided valuable intelligence on Japanese traffic up and down the Slot and Blanche Channel. Only a few miles from a Japanese headquarters, he remained isolated enough to continue his work. To protect himself from accidental discovery, Kennedy established a forbidden zone into which no Japanese could come without being destroyed. As long as they stayed outside that invisible perimeter, he left them alone. Should any enemy force cross that line, however, they would be attacked and annihilated. On one occasion Kennedy and his men hurried to a lagoon where two enemy barges had temporarily anchored. Although the barges were not looking for Kennedy, they had passed into his forbidden zone. Kennedy's men ambushed the Japanese, towed the barges to deep water, and sank them without a trace. Christians need forbidden zones in their lives, too; areas where they will allow no temptation to come without destroying it. There maybe some things we can do and not be in danger, but there must be a forbidden zone where temptation will be abolished, The farther from our essential interests we draw those lines, the better. The secret to spiritual safety is to keep the enemy as far removed as possible, not to let him get as close as possible where a slight misstep could bring disaster. (Hurley, V. Speaker's sourcebook of new illustrations Dallas: Word Publishers)

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Robert Morgan has 5 well done vignettes of Olympians in his message [1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Going for Gold: A Sermon About the Olympics](#)

1. **Eric Liddell:** Meet with the Coach Each Morning
2. **James Connolly:** Persevere Through Difficulties
3. **Jesse Owens:** Nurture the Right Friends
4. **Lawrence Lemieux:** Rescue the Perishing
5. **Felix Carvajal:** Finish Well

These stories are excellent illustrations of the truths in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

### Related Resources from Robert Morgan:

- [I Need Help With My Self-Control](#)
- [Maturity is Mastering the Secret of Self-Control](#)

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**John Walvoord** wrote that - In like manner the Christian's goal is to receive reward at the judgment seat of Christ, and therefore he

must accomplish the will of God. The Apostle Paul not only likens life to a race, but also to a boxing match where he beats his own body in order to bring it under subjection. The figure speaks of **self-discipline** and **self-control**. The reward promised is an incorruptible crown in contrast to the corruptible crown of laurel leaves which soon faded away, so often given athletes in Greek contests. Paul wanted to live and preach in such a way that he himself might not be considered worthless at the judgment seat of Christ. The term *rejected* refers to his rewards and life rather than to his personal salvation, and Paul had in mind that an athlete who did not conform to the rules would have his victory disallowed. (John Walvoord. The Future Work of Christ)

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**A W Tozer wrote - Mediocrity; Cross: demands of; Convenience** - What must our Lord think of us if His work and His witness depend upon the convenience of His people? The truth is that every advance that we make for God and for His cause must be made at our inconvenience. If it does not inconvenience us at all, there is no cross in it! If we have been able to reduce spirituality to a smooth pattern and it costs us nothing—no disturbance, no bother and no element of sacrifice in it—we are not getting anywhere with God. We have stopped and pitched our unworthy tent halfway between the swamp and the peak. We are mediocre Christians! Was there ever a cross that was convenient? Was there ever a convenient way to die? I have never heard of any, and judgment is not going to be a matter of convenience, either! Yet we look around for convenience, thinking we can reach the mountain peak conveniently and without trouble or danger to ourselves. Actually, mountain climbers are always in peril and they are always advancing at their inconvenience. (The Tozer Topical Reader 2:29-30. Camp Hill, PA.: WingSpread)