



SELF-CONTROL

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NORTHSTAR INSPIRATION

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from a Christian
Perspective*



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Self-control is almost a forgotten concept in our me-centered culture which is more interested in controlling other people than one's self. A quick look in the Bible revealed an interesting oversight. There there are no references to boss control. There were no descriptions of how to control one's spouse. I didn't see any mention of employee control. I looked for advice on controlling my neighbors and that was strangely missing too.

Although an out-of-favor idea within our society, self-control seems to be a germane and essential topic in the Bible.

A SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR A SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

The American Heritage Dictionary defines self-control as "the ability to exercise restraint or control over one's feelings, emotions, reactions, etc." It sounds so simple, but is much more difficult to put into practice.

In the early 1980s, Walter Mischel, a psychologist and researcher, conducted studies on self-control in children. In one study, children were brought into a room with a researcher and offered a sweet treat. They were welcome to eat the treat right then, but if they waited until the researcher returned 15

minutes later, they would receive an additional treat. Only about 30% of the children were able to wait. The study then followed those children as teens and into adulthood. Those who were able to exhibit self-control as 4-year-olds, were more successful academically and professionally, happier, healthier, wealthier, and had better social graces than those who did not. In fact, the level of those attributes had direct correlation to the amount of time the child had waited to eat the treat.

Self-control is essential to successful living in every area of life. The good news is that self-control can be developed and cultivated!

THE LACK OF SELF-CONTROL IS CAUSED BY:

- **Selfishness:** Being concerned with one's own interests

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”
James 4:1-3

- **Anger:** Being easily offended

“A quick tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.”
Proverbs 14:17

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1:19-20



- **Pride:** A high or inordinate opinion of one's own importance or superiority

“Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.” Proverbs 13:10

“Patience is better than pride.”
Ecclesiastes 7:8

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud. ...Do not be conceited.” Romans 12:16

“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
1 Peter 5:5

- **Rebelliousness:** Defying or resisting some established authority, government, or tradition

“Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.” Psalm 107:17

“Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.” Romans 13:2

COMMON COMPLAINTS AND EXCUSES

- I just can't control myself.
- I have my rights! This is about: my money, my children, my job, my time, my property, my life, etc.
- Why should I when no one else does?

- I will if these other people do the right thing first.
- He or she offended me.
- This is different and you don't understand.

THE LACK OF SELF-CONTROL CAUSES PROBLEMS

- Self ambition brings bitter fruit.
- It weakens your spiritual defenses: “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” Psalm 25:28
- It creates conflict and bickering: “A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.” Proverbs 15:18
- It causes financial difficulties.
- It can destroy relationships.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL

One of the things that makes us human is the ability to choose our response to any stimulus.

There is always a “choice point” in any situation, that moment when you decide how to respond to a stimulus. It is essential to identify your choice point.

Recognize and take responsibility for your uncontrolled behavior. Acknowledge your behavior is your choice, not someone else's fault.

Identify the underlying negative thoughts and beliefs that push you out of control. (selfishness, anger, pride, rebellion)

Learn to recognize when your emotions are escalating and adjust your “choice point” earlier to avoid uncontrolled emotion.

Know your weaknesses and develop strategies to avoid them when possible. Determine ahead of time what you will do if you encounter a difficult situation.

Imagine yourself acting with self-control in a situation that would generally trigger an out-of-control response. Repeatedly rehearse the self-controlled scenario in your mind so when it happens, that self-controlled response will come more naturally.

Learn to distract yourself by thinking about or doing something different.

Hang out with self-controlled people. The people you hang out with and think about will influence what you will do in a given situation.

SELF-CONTROL IS IMPORTANT

- Strengthens self-esteem and inner confidence.
- Eliminates a sense of helplessness.
- Gives a sense of control over your own destiny.
- Helps you avoid poor decisions based on raging emotion.
- Helps others view you as responsible and trustworthy.

FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-CONTROL

Love remembers no wrongs. [Love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 1 Corinthians 13:5

Love covers over mistakes. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

Love overlooks offenses. A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 19:11

Love is quick to forgive. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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