



The Good News

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Maintaining Self-Control

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You are at work or school and accidentally hit your head on an open cabinet or shelf...what is your reaction? What do you say (or mumble, or scream) when it happens? You are driving home from work or school or grocery shopping and somebody cuts right in front of you...what is your reaction? Do you grumble something concerning their lack of intelligence, or use an obscene gesture? Through the course of any given week, we are faced with dozens of spontaneous events that threaten our Christian example. How we control ourselves when things are going well is not near as telling as how we control ourselves when bad or irritating things happen. By our example during these times, people will either see a Christian who is in complete control of their emotions and conduct, or they will see a Christian who is lacking in control, perhaps nullifying any opportunity of teaching the Gospel.

In **Matt. 23:25**, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being “full of extortion and self-indulgence.” The term used in this passage is *akrasia*, which literally means “a lack of strength or power”. Jesus was showing how hypocritical it was for the Pharisees to make themselves appear so godly on the outside, yet they were deceitful and had no control over their desires. The same term is found in **II Tim. 3:3** where Paul describes the character of men in the “grievous times” as being “unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,” In these two passages, lacking the ability to control oneself is obviously condemned. In **Acts 24:25**, we see a different form of *akrasia*, *egkrateia*, being used to describe self-control. Righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come were the three things that Felix was reasoning within himself. To quote Vines, “the word follows “righteousness,” which represents

God's claims, self-control being man's response thereto”. Self-control is the ability to submit ourselves to the will of God, doing the things He wants us to do, and not doing the things that He has called sinful. Felix was reasoning this in conjunction with God's law (righteousness) and the judgment to come. In verse 25 we see that this terrified Felix. In **II Pet. 1:6**, we find that self-control is one of the characteristics that a Christian is to add to his character. In verse 9 we learn that “he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” One of the hardest things for us to do as humans is to deny ourselves something that we know is sinful. Peter shows us that when we don't control ourselves, not only does it provide a bad example for those around us, but it damages our relationship with God. We become “short-sighted”, not seeing the crown at the end of the race but rather only seeing (and succumbing to) that which is sinful.

Finally, in **I Cor. 9:25**, Paul tells us that he “who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.” Paul describes a race in which the Christian strives for mastery in being pleasing to God. This includes having the self-control to tell ourselves “no” to things that God says are sinful. So the next time we hit our head on a shelf, or get cut off in traffic, or are tempted in any way to disobey the commands of God, let's remember the Scriptures mentioned here regarding self-control, and let's make sure we are constantly controlling our emotions and our conduct. Our soul, as well as the souls who are influenced by us, depends on it.