

*Nine*  
F r u i t s  
*of the*  
S p i r i t

A Bible Study on Developing Christian Character

*Self-Control*

R o b e r t   S t r a n d



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## *Introduction*

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then ordered to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

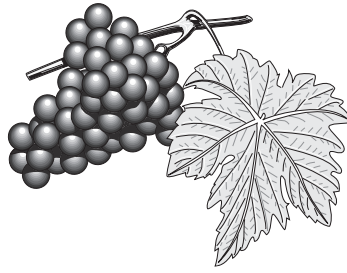
This fable expresses how many of us feel about the treasures of God's Word. There is coming a day when we will be thrilled because we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we had not gleaned much more. Jewels are best shown off when held up to a bright light and slowly turned so that each polished facet can catch and reflect the light. Each of these nine jewels of character will

be examined in the light of God's Word and how best to allow them to be developed in the individual life. That is how I feel about the following three verses from Paul's writings which challenge us with what their Christian character or personality should look like. Jesus Christ has boiled down a Christian's responsibility to two succinct commands: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and body, and love your neighbor like yourself. Likewise, Paul the apostle has captured for us the Christian personality in nine traits:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).

At the very beginning of this study, I must point out a subtle, yet obvious, distinction. The "fruit" of the Spirit is a composite description of what the Christian lifestyle and character traits are all about — an unbroken whole. We can't pick only the fruit we like.

Unlocked in these nine portraits are the riches of a Christ-centered personality. The thrill of the search is ahead of us!



# Self-Control

*ENKRATEIA*, (Greek), meaning: *en*, infused or within; *kratos*, vigor, dominion, power, strength. Having a great force within but under control.

*THE FRUIT OF THE  
SPIRIT IS . . . SELF-CONTROL!*



Self-control is the ability to live with restraints. Society today is telling us to let it all hang out, do your own thing, look out for #1, and to be free of all restraints. If we are to restrain or control ourselves in the eyes of this world it's only so that we do not abuse someone else. But the Bible goes much further. We are to manifest self-control in order to become like Jesus Christ! It is so that we can experience more and more of His presence and power working in and through our lifestyle. Self-control in reality is a very high form of worship because it is a living out of His commandments — it's a “doing” act of character in order that all of the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in us.

So we have come now to the last of these nine harvests of the Spirit. Taking a line from the “Beatitudes” of Jesus — BLESSED ARE THE SELF-CONTROLLED! Do you find it intriguing that Paul placed this one as last in his listing of the fruit? It’s certainly not the least of these. If I were writing these, most likely I would have listed this one as #1 because of its importance and how it relates to the development of the whole gamut of fruit to be harvested. Self-control plays a major role in the maturing of the other fruit in our living. This one provides what is needed to make the other eight operational. Self-control is the glue which holds all of life and all of the harvest of the fruit of the Spirit.

Robert Schuller tells an incredible story of self-discipline in his book, *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking*. It’s about a polio victim who required an iron lung to breathe and learned how to breathe without it, even though every muscle below his Adam’s apple is paralyzed. Karl Dewayne Sudekum, through discipline, has learned how to breathe like a frog. Here’s the story:

In 1953, while Karl was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, he contracted polio. For six years he could breathe only in an iron lung or on a tilt bed. Then he got mad — really angry. He decided he would breathe. He stopped the rocking motion of his bed and remembered how he used to breathe like a frog as a young boy in Nashville, Tennessee. It was a trick almost all kids knew. He would take air with his tongue and force it down his windpipe. When he exhaled, his lungs let out the air like a deflating balloon. He’s been breathing this way ever since. “Science doesn’t really know how it’s done,” he said. “It’s a two-cycle pumping action that some people can do and some can’t. Some people can whistle through their teeth, but I never could. It’s like that.” He could stay away from the iron lung as long as he remained awake. With his first real indepen-

dence, Sudekum decided to become an attorney.

In 1959 he entered the University of San Diego. His wife, Emerald, drove him to school and wheeled him into class. He couldn't take notes and a tape recorder was too awkward. He simply listened and remembered. Then he was told he had diabetes. That under control, the doctors discovered an ulcer. For a year he lived with a mysterious high fever, a reaction to medication. Still, he got his diploma and passed the bar exam.

He is practicing law now and signs documents, K.D. Sudekum. It is too much of a task to write his full name with a pen in his teeth. When he talks too long in court, his face gets very red, but it's nothing to worry about. A cold is something else. It could be fatal. So what does he do? "I don't get colds." If he falls asleep or faints while out on his own, frog breathing, he will die unless someone who knows his condition

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administers artificial respiration. What does he do about that? “I try to think about it as little as possible.”

What a fabulous story of self-control. Now I don’t feel so bad about my difficult day. How about you?

Paul the Apostle has written a great passage (1 Cor. 9:24–27) where he likens himself and all of us to athletes who are in vigorous training: “I do not run aimlessly — I beat my body and make it my slave.” Pretty strong language in regards to self-control. Nobody said it would be easy. It may be easy to read in concept or principle — but to put it into practice, well that may be something else.

*SELF-CONTROL IS . . .*



Putting it off doesn’t make this any easier. This is one area where we have a desperate personal struggle. Who really is in charge? What life principles will I live by? Who makes the decisions about how life will be lived? These and many more come to mind as we consider our subject at hand. In a major sense, self-control involves the proper use of freedoms. So let’s get with it.

Our first study takes us to the writings of Paul as a foundation to all that shall follow this study. Read 1 Corinthians 9:15–27.

What have been your personal motivations for self-control in your past?

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What did you grow up with?

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What are some of the “rights” Paul is referring to?

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What is he referring to when he says, “not make use of my right in preaching”?

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