

LESSON 9

SELF-CONTROL, SELF-RESTRAINT



Scripture Texts: Matthew 16:24-25; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

In the study of this lesson we are going to look at the strength derived from self-control and self-restraint, or self-discipline. These closely related titles are all very definitely a part of the life of each of us.

We often hear the expression, "It all depends on the individual," meaning that whether good or evil is done depends upon personal choice. This is true. But it is also true that the average individual is influenced greatly by the social environment in which he lives. Self-control and high ideals on the part of the individual are of primary importance, but good environment is also important. The places you frequent and the company you associate with go far in determining the self-restraint

used in the Christian way of life. Temperance is translated self-control.

MEMORY VERSE: *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. — 1 Corinthians 9:25a*

Stumbling Block of Self

Matthew 16:24-25. **Deny . . . take . . . and follow me.** Jesus made it plain that moral and spiritual victory is difficult to the point of pain. **For whosoever will save . . . shall lose . . . : and whosoever will lose . . . shall find.** Jesus declared that life is found only by losing it, and that if a man would follow in His steps, that one must deny himself **and take up his cross, and follow** his Leader. Satan, our adversary, has many suggestions of ways for us to try to reach victory in daily life by some route other than that of rigorous self-discipline. When saints try to hold their ground and yet reject self-control as the way to greater glory, they fall back into the old life of sin. They become neutralized and are once again absorbed by the world. When one fails to go forward, he automatically begins to go backward.

To deny one's self is more than self-restraint. It involves more than saying no to some things. Denying one's self is to do an about face; not only to deny certain sins, but to deny sin altogether. Anyone who has gained this experience knows that the reward is greater than words can describe. One loses his life, places it without reservation in the hands of the Lord and finds it returned to him again, filled with peace and joy, power and glory (see Romans 8:13).

An Incorruptible Crown

First Corinthians 9:24-25. **So run, that ye may obtain.** Paul here uses a natural race to show how we must make daily preparation to gain the victory. Without much self-control, no athlete can hope to excel and be a winner. Paul calls attention to the fact that only one man wins a race. But in the Christian race, to finish is to win. Paul implies that this involves self-control, training, and practice. **And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.** Every man that strives in the race exercises self-control in all things. Now in athletic contests, they do it to receive a corruptible crown—a trophy or personal prize. But the saint is in it to receive an incorruptible crown. Paul was thinking of the Olympic games of his day. The crown was perishable—a head wreath consisting of a few sprigs of pine or parsley or olive branches twined together. Yet this crown was one of the most coveted awards in the pagan world but of no eternal value. The "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10) and "crowns of gold" (Revelation 4:4) are symbols of complete and eternal value for the saint.

It is a fact that millions of people throw away their chance of eternal life for the poor mess of pottage offered them of a life of indulgence. There is momentary *fun* in all carnal indulgences—there-in lies their appeal. But crowns such as this wither and fade, leaving the winner despised in his own sight, a failure in the sight of others, and separated from his God. But who wants to have *fun* when they can have *peace* and *joy*?

Buffet the Body

First Corinthians 9:26-27. **But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.** Paul declared that the living of a moral life involved rigorous self-discipline. Paul ran not uncertainly. We, too, must have a definite goal to reach. That destination is the eternal glory of Heaven. Paul said he fought not as one beating the air. He was no shadow boxer. He confronted real evil, real enemies in the world, and he knew it. Paul buffeted his body. He—and we also—must beat down the insistent craving of the flesh for indulgence. We must buffet our bodies and bring them into subjection to the Word and Spirit of God. Moral effort is not enough, but to repress evil is an important step in gaining victory in our daily living. Even though this may be considered an extreme attitude, the position of sex in our lives cannot be disregarded. We must always keep in mind that the handling of the subject of sex involves struggle. Parents, in their daily relationship with their children, need to make it plain that certain things are morally wrong and that certain things are morally right, and that relinquishing of helpful moral convictions is an invitation to behave immorally. Let young people be aware that while the decision for total abstinence may be hard to make and harder to maintain, it will prove to be the most rewarding decision of their lives, next to choosing salvation.

JUST A THOUGHT

Better alone than in bad company.