

# A Study on "SELF-CONTROL"

A look at various concepts related to the issue of self-control.

- INTRODUCTION (About the words in this study)
  - GROUP 1: SOUNDNESS OF MIND
  - GROUP 2: BEING "SOBER-MINDED" (HAVING "CLEAR THINKING")
  - GROUP 3: STRENGTH TO CONTROL ONE'S ACTIONS
  - FINAL QUESTIONS (After all three groups have been studied individually)
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## SELF-CONTROL

### INTRODUCTION - PART 1

#### Definitions of the words examined in this study

This study is based on three groups New Testament Greek words. Here are the definitions, in English. For those who are interested, the specific Greek words are given in **PART 2**. But this is optional, and the study can be understood without them.

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#### The **FIRST** Word Group: Being "in control" (focus mainly on the mind).

- The *first word group* has to do with "**being of a sound mind**." The specific usage can range from "**clear, proper thinking**" about something, to "**self-control**" - proper control of one's desires and actions (normally with a focus on the mental aspect of this control).

#### The **SECOND** Word Group: NOT being "out of control" (focus mainly on the mind).

- The *second word group* originally came from the idea of being **sober** (not being controlled by wine). But the word expanded to the idea of having **self-control** (being "**sober-minded**"), rather than being blindly controlled by other things around us. This type of thinking is **unconfused thinking**.

## The THIRD Word Group: Applying control to our actions.

- The *third word group* has a somewhat different focus. Whereas the previous two words focused more on one's mind - controlling one's thoughts or thinking properly - this word focuses on the **control of one's actions**. The opposite concept ("lack of self-control" - same Greek root word) is also included in this part of the study.
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### Words from two of the groups occur together in four passages:

- 1 Timothy 3:2 - Overseers must be...
  1. temperate (NIV, NAS) or vigilant (KJV) **[2nd word group]**
  2. self-controlled (NIV) or prudent (NAS) or sober (KJV) **[1st word group]**
- Titus 1:8 - Overseers must be...
  1. self-controlled (NIV) or sensible (NAS) or sober (KJV) **[1st word group]**
  2. disciplined (NIV) or self-controlled (NAS) or temperate (KJV) **[3rd word group]**
- Titus 2:2 - Older men are to be...
  1. temperate (NIV, NAS) or sober (KJV) **[2nd word group]**
  2. self-controlled (NIV) or sensible (NAS) or temperate (KJV) **[1st word group]**
- 1 Peter 4:7 - All are to be...
  1. clear-minded (NIV) or of sound judgment (NAS) or sober (KJV) **[1st word group]**
  2. self-controlled (NIV) or of sober spirit (NAS) or (all are to...) watch (KJV) **[2nd word group]**

### Two observations can be quickly noted from these verses:

1. At one time or another, words from each word group can be translated as "self-control," for each group focuses on some aspect of this broad concept.
  2. The KJV translation does not always use the words "sober" and "temperate" in the same way that other translations (and most people in the 20th century) use those words. This can be confusing, if one is not aware of that fact.
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**PART 2** of the Introduction looks at the Greek words themselves. This is optional and can be skipped, if desired. [The study of Greek words can be helpful, but is *not* a mandatory prerequisite for studying the Scriptures! That is why God gave us translators!]

# SELF-CONTROL

## INTRODUCTION - PART 2

### About the Greek words used in this study

These definitions are based on "Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament." In some instances, in which there are multiple definitions, some of the definitions may have *not* been used in the New Testament. (The definitions include the ways *other* Greek writers used the words.)

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#### SOUND MIND

- **sophroneo** - to be of sound mind, i.e. 1) to be in one's right mind; 2) to exercise self control, i.e. a) to put a moderate estimate upon one's self, to think of one's self soberly, b) to curb one's passions
  - **sophronizo** - to restore one to his senses; to moderate, control, curb, discipline; to hold one to his duty; to admonish, to exhort earnestly
  - **sophronismos** - 1) an admonishing or calling to soundness of mind, to moderation and self-control; 2) self-control, moderation
  - **sophronos** - with sound mind, soberly, temperately, discreetly
  - **sophrosune** - 1) soundness of mind; 2) self-control, sobriety
  - **sophron** - 1) of a sound mind, sane, in one's senses; 2) curbing one's desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate
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#### SOBER-MINDED

- **nephalios** - sober, temperate; abstaining from wine, either entirely or at least from its immoderate use.

**Note about this word:** Since this word is normally translated "sober" or "temperate," our immediate inclination may be to interpret it as restricting the use of wine, etc. However, the metaphoric use of the word (sober-minded) is probably intended, for in each place this word occurs, different words that specifically focus on the "wine issue" can be found - both in the immediate and nearby contexts.

The following list shows: 1) the verse in which the word "sober" (**nephalios**) occurs, and 2) verses where in the nearby context which specifically address the "wine issue":

1. **1 Timothy 3:2 & 1 Timothy 3:11** - In v. 3, the overseer (who is told to be "temperate" in v. 2) is told to not be "given over" (addicted) to wine. In v. 8, deacons are told to not "focus their attention" on wine. In contrast with these two verses, Timothy is encouraged to use some wine, in 5:23 (of course, NOT in a manner that contradicts the previous verses!).
2. **Titus 2:2** - In v. 3, older women are told that they should not be "enslaved" by wine. Verse 1:7 reminds overseers that they are not to be "given over" (addicted) to wine.

- **nepho** - to be calm and collected in spirit; to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect
- **ananepho** - to return to soberness
- **eknepho** - 1) to return to one's self from drunkenness, become sober; 2) (metaph.) to return to soberness of mind

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## **STRENGTH, CONTROL (especially over one's desires)**

- **akrasia** - lack of self-control, incontinence, intemperance
- **akrates** - without self-control, intemperate
- **egkrateia** - self-control (the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites)
- **egkrateuomai** - to be self-controlled, continent; to exhibit self-government, conduct one's self temperately
- **egkrates** - 1) strong, robust; 2) having power over, possessed of (a thing); 3) mastering, controlling, curbing, restraining, controlling one's self, temperate, continent

# SELF CONTROL - WORD GROUP 1

## SOUNDNESS OF MIND

### The three sections:

- Outline of this Word
  - Other Concepts (found within the context of this word)
  - Questions
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## OUTLINE

### A. Being in One's Right Mind

- Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35 - [After Jesus healed the demoniac] - People came... and saw the demoniac sitting dressed and **in his right mind**.
- 2 Corinthians 5:13 [See context - Paul is defending himself against false accusations] If we are out of our mind, it is for God's sake; if we are **in our right mind**, it is for you.

### B. Training a Person (to act properly) [verb form of the word]

- Titus 2:4 - Older women, once they had been taught how to live (by Titus), were to **train** the younger women how to live. [...that is, to teach them how they should "control themselves"]

### C. Who is instructed to be self-controlled?

- Overseers - 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8
- Young men - Titus 2:6
- Older men - Titus 2:2
- Younger women - taught by the older women. [Implication: the older women must also learn it!] - Titus 2:5

In other words, we ALL are to learn this!

## NOTES ABOUT THIS SECTION:

1. All are taught by *grace* - Titus 2:12 (See below.)
2. Titus was told to teach the men and the older women. But he was told to let the older women teach the younger ones!
3. Each of the above passages includes additional character traits that the individuals were also to possess or learn. You may want to look at some... especially if they apply to you!

### **D. Self-control / self-discipline / clear and proper thinking is to influence both attitudes and actions.**

- ***Influencing the way we think about ourselves.***  
Romans 12:3 - Think about yourself: *not* more highly than you ought [an "inflated" mind] but with **sober judgment** [a well (not sick) mind]. (Note the context. None of us should consider ourselves more "special" than anyone else in the body of Christ. We are all equally a part, each with his special place.)
- ***Influencing our response to circumstances.***  
1 Peter 4:7 - The end of all things is near. Therefore be **clear minded** and self-controlled so that you can pray. [Also: love each other deeply, show hospitality, use the gifts God has given you, etc.]
- ***Influencing one's thoughts and words: an example (Paul).***  
Acts 26:25 (Paul to Festus) - [Paul's testimony about what God had done in his life] What I am saying is true and **reasonable**. (rather than an manifestation of insanity).
- ***Influencing women's lifestyles.***  
1 Timothy 2:9, 15 Women are to dress modestly, with decency and **propriety** [self-control / self-restraint] (rather than putting on a show, to draw attention to themselves). ...(they are to...) continue in faith, love and holiness, with **propriety** [self-restraint]. <Note: It is not our purpose here to explore the various interpretations of v. 15a. Note also that instructions are given to men both before and after this passage, but the word presently being studied is not present in those verses.>

## **E. God has given us what is necessary for this characteristic to be a part of our lives.**

- *Those who know God have received a spirit of self-control.*  
2 Timothy 1:7 - God... gave us a spirit of **self-discipline** (also of power and love - all contrasted to a spirit of timidity, which does not come from him).
  - *God's grace teaches us to live self-controlled lives.*  
Titus 2:12 - The grace of God... teaches us to live **self-controlled**, upright and godly lives (as well as: to reject ungodliness and worldly passions, and to anticipate his return).
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## **Other Concepts (within the context)**

[Concepts may be found in the context surrounding the verse references given below.]

### **A. Concepts that are INCOMPATIBLE with Self-Control**

- Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35 - demon possession
- Acts 26:25 - insanity; being out of one's mind
- Romans 12:3 - "inflated" thinking about one's self; being conformed to the world's way of thinking
- 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2-10 - [lists of qualities - mentions a few items considered incompatible]
- 2 Timothy 1:7 - a spirit of timidity; being ashamed to openly talk about Jesus
- Titus 2:12 - saying "Yes" to ungodliness and worldly passions

### **B. Concepts that are RELATED to or ASSOCIATED with Self-Control**

- Acts 26:25 - speaking truthfully
  - 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2-10 - [lists of qualities]
  - 2. Timothy 1:7 - a spirit of power and of love
  - Titus 2:12 - being upright and godly
  - 1 Peter 4:7 - [various commands]
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# QUESTIONS

(You may include verses which are not a part of this study.)

- How might a Christian be viewed as being "out of his mind," in the sense of 2 Corinthians 5:13? (You might also wish to look at other verses such as: 1 Corinthians 1:18+)
- Some aspects of self-control may involve teaching/learning. Are there any ways in which you can (or should be) involved in this (either as a teacher or a learner)? If you really should, what steps can/will you take to begin?
- List some specific ways in which self-control or self-discipline needs to influence your attitudes and actions. Most likely, you will have opportunity in the next week to practice some of these things. So think about them, plan possible courses of action, and try to remember these things when the opportunity arrives.
- God has given us everything we need, in order that we may have self-control. Review the verses that focus on what God has done. These verses can be a source of encouragement (for those who are weak, yet who keep trying) or a source of warning (for those who don't care and prefer to continue sinning). How can you use these promises as a source of encouragement when you stumble (when you fail to have self-control)? [Remember that these promises do *not* negate *your responsibility* to obey and submit to the Word of God. Do not twist and distort these facts about God's provision so that they become an excuse for spiritual laziness! 2 Peter 3:16b]

# SELF CONTROL – WORD GROUP 2

## BEING "SOBER-MINDED" OR HAVING UNCONFUSED THINKING

### The three sections:

- Outline of this Word
  - Other Concepts (found within the context of this word)
  - Questions
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## OUTLINE

### A. ALL of us are to be "sober-minded" - to have clear thinking about the Lord's return.

- *Rather than having false views about the resurrection (and the moral conduct that can accompany such a view).*  
1 Corinthians 15:34 Come to your senses [be sober-minded] and stop sinning.  
[see v. 32b-33]
- *Alert, ready for the Lord's return (rather than being asleep, as the pagans are).*  
1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8 - Let us be alert and **self-controlled** (not like others who are asleep and not ready for his return)... Let us be **self-controlled** [protected, with faith / love as a breastplate and the hope (anticipation) of salvation as a helmet].

### B. Specific groups / individuals who are told to be "sober-minded"

- Overseers - 1 Timothy 3:2
- Women (Deacon's wives? - see context) - 1 Timothy 3:11
- Older men - Titus 2:2

- Timothy - a pattern for leadership  
2 Timothy 4:5 - "**Keep your head**" in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill the duties of your ministry. [See also v. 2: Preach the Word, etc.]
- [Note: The rest of us are addressed in the first section of this outline!]

### C. Clear thinking in regards to our present trials and our future hope:

- *A readiness to let Jesus' return and God's holiness influence the way we think and act.*  
1 Peter 1:13 - Prepare your minds for action, be **self-controlled**, focus your hope [anticipation] on the grace you will receive when Jesus returns (= the completion of everything that is a part of our salvation). [v. 14+ Be holy as your Father in heaven in holy...] [Previous verses: You are suffering trials (which are purifying your faith) and you are eagerly looking forward to the future aspects of your salvation.]
- *A careful evaluation of the circumstances around us and a proper response to them; a focus on soon-coming events.*  
1 Peter 4:7 - The end of all things is near. Therefore be **clear minded** and self-controlled so that you can pray. [Also: love each other deeply, show hospitality, use the gifts God has given you, etc.; v. 12+ - Don't be surprised by trials...]
- *Aware of the enemy's desire to destroy us.*  
1 Peter 5:8 - Be self-controlled and alert. The devil - like a roaring lion- seeks to devour us (through our trials - see v. 9+). Also v. 6-7: Humble yourselves; cast your anxieties on God (let *him* do the "worrying"! [Note: the word "alert" is the same as used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6. These two concepts go together!]

### D. Helping others to come to their senses

- 2 Timothy 2:26 - [v. 24-25: The Lord's servant must... gently correct those who oppose him, in hope that God will grant them repentance...] and that they will **come to their senses** (and escape the devil's trap...)
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# Other Concepts (within the context)

[Concepts may be found in the context surrounding the verse references given below.]

## A. Concepts that are **INCOMPATIBLE** with Self-Control

- 1 Corinthians 15:34 - sinning
- 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 - darkness, drunk, being overtaken by "the day" (all applied metaphorically, referring to being unprepared for the Lord's coming), experiencing God's wrath
- 2 Timothy 4:3-5 - turning away from the truth

## B. Concepts that are **RELATED** to or **ASSOCIATED** with Self-Control

- 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 - being alert; faith, love, hope
- 1 Timothy 3:2, 11; 4:1-5; Titus 2:2 - [lists of qualities]
- 2 Timothy 2:26 - repentance, escaping the devil's trap
- 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8 - [numerous commands, etc., in context]

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# QUESTIONS

(You may include verses which are not a part of this study.)

We should have clear, unconfused thinking in all areas of life. But much of the focus in these verses is on clear thinking about trials we experience in this present life and about the things we should expect in the future - Jesus' return and our future hope. Review what the verses say about these things.

- In the verses given, what are some ways in which confused or "fuzzy" thinking about these things can result in wrong actions?
- In what ways can we be "sober" or have clear thinking about the Lord's return? our present circumstances (trials)? our future expectations? Do you ever have confused, uncertain thinking in these areas? What are some things you can work on to change your thinking?
- What are some past instances in which false thinking led you to wrong actions? What are some things you can do to avoid cloudy, false thinking? How can you help others in this matter? [Note: Helping others in this matter is one of the primary obligations of leadership (2 Timothy 2:26), but probably many of us have some situations in which we should do it. See Galatians 6:1, as an example of this.]

# SELF CONTROL – WORD GROUP 3

## STRENGTH TO CONTROL ONE'S ACTIONS

### The three sections:

- Outline of this Word
  - Other Concepts (found within the context of this word)
  - Questions
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## OUTLINE

### A. A dimension of salvation

- *One aspect of "faith in Jesus"*  
Acts 24:24-25 - [Paul speaking about "faith in Jesus."] ... he was discussing righteousness, **self-control** and the judgment to come
- *One of the "fruit of the Spirit"*  
Galatians 5:22-23 - The fruit of the Spirit is... **self-control**. [v. 24+ The works of the flesh (v. 19+) have been crucified... now it's time for us to live a Spirit-filled lifestyle (described in v. 22+).]
- *A necessity for "assurance of salvation"*  
2 Peter 1:3-11 - [Since God has given us everything we need for life/godliness... (v. 3-4)] "Add to your faith... **self-control** (etc.)" [v. 8+ If you have these qualities (mentioned in v. 5-7) in *increasing* measure, you will not have "fruitless" lives...] [v. 10+ Make your calling and election sure: if you *do these things*, you will never fall and will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom...]

## B. A necessary part of life

- *Needed by overseers*  
Titus 1:7-9 - The overseer must be... **self-controlled**
- *All need to add it to their lives*  
2 Peter 1:3-11 - Add to your faith... **self-control** (etc.) [mentioned in greater detail in the previous section]

## C. Some important aspects of self-control (shown by illustrations)

- *It must be from the heart (not merely an external appearance)*  
Matthew 23:25-26 - [Illustrated figuratively by Jesus, talking to the Pharisees (religious leaders) who were full of "self-indulgence" (**lack of self-control**)...]..."First clean the inside of the cup/dish and the outside will become clean also!"
- *An example to learn from: the athlete*  
1 Corinthians 9:24-27+ Everyone who competes in the games **exercises self-control** [follow their example, etc.] [ALSO: ... Learn from the past - the example of Israel (people who did *not* have self-control); 10:13 - God has provided a way for you to escape temptation...]

## D. Sexual self-control: Take necessary measures to avoid sin in areas that self-control may be lacking.

- *If you are married...*  
1 Corinthians 7:1-7 - Fulfill marital obligations to your spouse, refraining only a short time (by mutual consent and for times of prayer) lest Satan tempt either of you because of your **lack of self-control**.
- *If you are not married and do not have self-control*  
1 Corinthians 7:8-9 - For those who do not have **self-control**, it is better to marry. [This is contrasted to the person who has the ability to remain single without being overcome by sensual desires. Paul describes such an ability as a "gift" (v. 7).]

## E. Concerning the *lack* of self-control

- *It is a characteristic of those who are godless in the "last days"*  
2 Timothy 3:1-5 - People will be... without self-control... (etc.)
- *It is described as "self-indulgence"... and makes one worthy of "woe"*  
Matthew 23:25-26 - The Pharisees (religious leaders)... full of **self-indulgence** ("lack of self-control"). "Woe to you..."

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## Other Concepts (within the context)

[Concepts may be found in the context surrounding the verse references given below.]

### A. Concepts that are **INCOMPATIBLE** with Self-Control

- Matthew 23:25 - robbery, self-indulgence [The word translated "self-indulgence" means "not-self-controlled"]
- Galatians 5:22-24 - see previous context: the flesh ("sinful nature") with all its passions and desires
- 2 Timothy 3:1-5 - characteristics of the ungodly

### B. Concepts that are **RELATED** to or **ASSOCIATED** with Self-Control

- Acts 24:25 - righteousness and judgment - aspects of "faith in Christ"
- Galatians 5:22-23 - the fruit of the Spirit; crucifying the flesh ("sinful nature") and its passions and desires; living and walking by the Spirit
- Titus 1:7-9 - [list of characteristics]
- 2 Peter 1:3-11 [list of character qualities that must increase in our lives; assurance of salvation; etc.]

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## QUESTIONS

(You may include verses which are not a part of this study.)

- What are some of the things God has given us, in order that we may be able to control our actions? How important is lifestyle to Christianity? What relationship is there between actions and heart? What does the Word of God tell you about *your* obligations in this matter?
- If you have self-control in your life, how can it be a source of encouragement for you? How can an "increasing measure" of self-control encourage you? According to 2 Peter 1, when can a person rightfully have "assurance of salvation"? How can we be guaranteed to have fruitful lives?

- In 2 Peter 1:8, the phrase "in increasing measure" (or something similar, depending on translation) is very important:
  1. It tells us that we *haven't* yet attained to 100% perfect total self-control. There will be times in which we will fail to have it.
  2. It also tells us that we cannot be lax and lazy in trying to become more consistent in our lives. Our self-control *must* increase. [Don't forget: God has given us what is necessary, so that it *will* increase!]

How can this and other passages encourage you, when you discover you have failed to have self-control? How do they serve as a warning you if you are lazy and don't care?

- Perhaps the basic principle in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 could be described as: "Take necessary measures to avoid sin in areas that self-control may be lacking." What are some issues in your life in which this might apply?

# SELF CONTROL

## FINAL QUESTIONS

- Self-control is very important... yet very much absent in today's world - even among those who claim to be "Christian" (Luke 6:46; James 1:22). Review what you have learned. Do any of the verses in this study speak directly to you? (Include verses which are not included in other questions.) Think about these verses, and ways to apply them to your life. How can these verses have an effect on your lifestyle?
- In the "Other Concepts" sections of these studies, look at some of the concepts which are related to, or associated with, self-control. Are there any concepts that catch your attention, which you would like to explore further? Do so! Look at some of the things that are incompatible with self-control. Are any of these characteristic of your life? If so, then perhaps doing something about it is the next "project" that you (and God) need to work on.
- If you have discovered that there is nothing in your heart that encourages you to have self-control, you need to examine yourself. If you are truly a disciple of Jesus, there *will* be something within you (originating from the Spirit within you) that causes you to want to be self-controlled... and gives you the power to increasingly be so. If this is not the case, however, you need to search the Scriptures and make sure you really understand what it means to be a Christian (disciple of Jesus). If you have gotten this far in the study on self-control, and know that something is seriously wrong in you, consider this: Perhaps God is using this to stir your conscience. Perhaps he wants to bring you to a *genuine* relationship with him! Keep your focus on his Word... and let *him* work on your heart.