

Exercising Self-Control

Bob Jennings

illbehonest.com

What good is a faucet without controls, a car without brakes, a horse without reins, an athlete without self-control? Dams are built for rivers. Credit cards are issued with limits. Practically everything must be controlled. So also in the spiritual realm self-control is a virtue.

But we are in a day when men are brutal, fierce, reckless, lawless, wild, “without self-control” (2 Tim. 3:3). The Jeffrey Dahmer defense pleaded that he could not control himself, and true it is that man, as a slave of sin and of Satan, has little internal self-restraint. But sin is not God’s fault and he intends to put the uncontrolled in hell. The Bible says, for example, that those who habitually break out in anger shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19). The Apostle Paul talked with Felix about self-control and God’s judgment on uncontrolled- the governor trembled (Acts 24:25). It is a heaven or hell issue.

But the good news is that when one becomes a Christian, as such, he is indwelt by the Spirit of God and the fruit of the Spirit includes “self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23). The Holy Spirit breaks the power of sin and produces self-control. He sees that money can be turned into eternal treasures and controls his spending that he may give to those in need. It takes great strength to control our eating, lusts, sleep, words, thoughts, yes, our spirit. But the Christian is indeed controlled by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). How can I disappoint the One who has done so much for me? Remember Joseph’s victory when tempted with adultery, “How could I do this great evil and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9).

The Bible puts high honors on self-control, as it is written, “he who rules his spirit is better than he who captures a city” (Prov. 16:32). Think of the Caesar’s, the Alexanders, and the Napoleon’s who captured cities, lands, and peoples. Yet, many were the conquerors who were really captors. They could govern people but not their own heart, their appetites, their lusts, their lips. You see, better was Gideon’s control over his spirit in non-retaliation (Judges 8:2) than his conquest of the Midianites. Better was David’s control over his spirit in much long-patience under Saul’s oppression than his great victory over the Jebusites. And better was his control in humble submission to Abigail’s rebuke than all of Nabal’s spoils. Yes, these are truly “more than conquerors”. Yes, God has called us to be kings (Rev. 1:6) – not to rule over lands and peoples, but to have dominion over sin, to be lords of our lives.