



[Galatians 5:23](#)

(23) gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.
New King James Version

The [fruit of the Spirit](#) are listed in [Galatians 5:22-23](#). The last one Paul lists is self-control (NKJV) or temperance (KJV). A principle of interpretation we use when qualities like this are listed is that the most important comes first. However, *why* does Paul list them in this order? The list begins with "[love](#)" and ends with "self-control/temperance." Did Paul arrange this list in this order because it takes love to precipitate all the other characteristics, and if a person truly walks in the Spirit, the fruit will culminate in temperance?

Possibly, but understood this way, self-control is not the least of the fruit of the Spirit but a major goal. Most of the time, we do not [sin](#) because we are in ignorance, but because we simply will not make the sacrifice to control ourselves. Were [Adam and Eve](#) in ignorance when they sinned? Of course not! They sinned because they did not control themselves to obey what they knew. If this principle were not so, [God](#) could not hold the uncalled, the spiritual Gentiles of [this world](#), guilty based on natural law. Romans 2 makes it clear the uncalled know a great deal, but even with that knowledge, they still do not submit. Temperance is the fruit that, when applied to life, provides the right balance to glorify God.

Temperance, in modern English, usually refers only to restraint toward alcoholic beverages, but the biblical application is much broader. The Greek word, *engkrateia*, is the noun form of a verbal root that means "strong in a thing; strength; power; dominion; having power over; being master of." Its true biblical application, then, is synonymous with "self-mastery" or "self-control." Paul uses it this way in relation to the general demeanor of a bishop in [Titus 1:8](#): ". . . but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, [self-controlled](#)." He applies it to sex in [1 Corinthians 7:9](#): ". . . but if they cannot exercise self-control let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." In [1 Corinthians 9:27](#), this word describes his discipline of his body in

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Barnes' Notes on [Galatians 5:23](#), p. 388, comments:

It denotes the self-rule which a man has over the evil propensities of his nature. Our word temperance we use now in a much more limited sense, as referring mainly to abstinence from intoxicating drinks. But the word here used is employed in a much more extended signification. It includes the dominion over all evil propensities, and may denote continence, chastity, self-government, moderation in regard to all indulgences as well as abstinence from intoxicating drinks. . . . The sense here is, that the influences of the [Holy Spirit](#) on the heart make a man moderate in all indulgences; teach him to restrain his passions, and to govern himself; to control his evil propensities, and to subdue all inordinate affection. . . . A Christian must be a temperate man; and if the effect of his religion is not to produce this, it is false and vain. . . . Nothing does more scandal to religion than such indulgences; and, other things being equal, he is the most under the influence of the Spirit of God who is the most thoroughly a man of temperance.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Eating: How Good It Is! \(Part Six\)](#)

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