



# Self-Discipline

TEXT: Philippians 3:7-15

KEY VERSE: He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. — Proverbs 25:28

Without a willingness to discipline oneself, and bring thoughts and actions into conformity with the Word of God, one cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Self-discipline, then, must be practiced not only by ministers and missionaries, but by everyone who desires to make Heaven his home. This means more than just forsaking sin and sinful pleasures. It includes a willingness to develop oneself spiritually and to make sacrifices for the Lord and His work.

1. Just as the physical heart is endangered by excessive fat from overeating, so is the spiritual life en-dangered by overindulgence in the affairs of this life. Explain how this could happen. See Luke 21:34.

2. How do the goals of Christians differ from those of non-Christians? What verse in our text indicates that Paul had realized this?

3. Referring to question 2, how do the means of reaching these goals differ? How are they alike?

## ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

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## RESPONSES

1. In discussing this, the students should conclude that one must not only resist sinful pleasure, but must continually guard against being engrossed in the cares of life so that the Lord's coming will not come upon him unawares. If one's time and money are taken up with accumulating the things of this life and the heart becomes set on these things, the cross of Christ is abandoned.

2. You might wish to open the discussion of these questions by asking your class to identify some of the goals of non-Christians versus Christians. The student should see that men's approval and earthly fame are not the goals of a Christian. His aim is to please God who has called him with a holy calling. Paul indicated this in verse 7 where he brings out that the things which at one time were important to him, he now "counted loss for Christ."

3. Many earthly goals are reached by carnal means; heavenly goals are attained by spiritual means. They are alike in that both require a commitment toward achieving the goal on the part of each individual. Earthly goals can cause the loss of the soul; heavenly goals can mean the salvation of the soul. However, an individual cannot reach the heavenly goal by adopting just any means, but must follow the guidelines of the Word of God.

4. Why did Paul say, “forgetting those things which are behind”? What do you think this has to do with self-discipline?

5. In the first half of verse 15, Paul directs his words to “as many as be perfect.” He writes, “Let us therefore . . .” (referring back to verse 3). Who were these people with whom he included himself? See 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 2 Timothy 2:5.

6. What assurance does Paul give to the Christian that God will be faithful to each individual and will help him align his life to the will of God?

7. In your own words, describe the condition of an individual who allows himself to yield to every whim and fancy. Use Ephesians 4:14 as a reference.

8. Self-discipline is a necessity if one is to succeed in attaining any kind of goal. Give your definition of self-discipline and then cite some examples showing why it is vital for spiritual success.

4. As your class discusses these questions they should see that Paul did not presume to have reached the goal in his Christian race, but he had his face set as a flint Zionward. He was not dwelling on previous successes or failures, but disciplining himself to continue to seek the things of Christ. If a person is absorbed too much with the things of the past, he will be hindered in his progression toward the future.

5. Encourage your class to give their explanations. In the original Greek, the word *perfect* as used in this verse, means “to be spiritually adult, full-grown.” Paul was speaking to those who were fully established in the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:6), those who knew and were complying with the laws of the “course” (2 Timothy 2:5). They were fully fit for running the race. Help your students to recognize that all those who want to be mature Christians must bring their lives into conformity with God’s Word in every phase of their spiritual walk.

6. Verse 15 continues by stating “if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.” God is faithful to all those who are willing to follow Him. He will help them to have a spiritual mind, and to accept His instruction so that they can, indeed, mature spiritually.

7. Help your students to conclude that without focus, direction and control being exercised, a person is considered a child, and he opens himself to every wind of doctrine or pressure of doubt and discouragement. You might wish to use the illustration of sailing a boat—when the sails are set correctly, the winds that blow can be mastered and used to advantage. If, on the other hand, the sails are put up without any particular regard as to how they are raised, the winds may well cause the boat to capsize.

8. Allow time for your students to zero in on specifics. Some examples to get the discussion started: In order to be a successful Sunday school teacher, one would need to discipline himself to study, prepare, and be there. In order to be a member of the orchestra, self-discipline would be required to practice regularly, and to attend rehearsal sessions. Self-discipline requires the exertion of effort. While Christians look to the Lord for help, and pray earnestly to be effective in whatever the Lord has called them to do, they must also put forth some effort in the form of self-discipline to succeed in reaching their goals.

## YOUR WRAP-UP

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## SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

What are some things God expects us to do for ourselves?

Some people say they cannot help themselves, so that is why they give in to temptations. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

How does God deal with individuals when they lack self-discipline?

What is a testimony?

Are things that are legal always right to do? Why or why not?

What is the relationship between self-restraint and total commitment to God?

What comparisons can you make between the discipline of athletes, as described in the ANSWER story, and the discipline in the life of a devoted Christian?

Why is self-denial important to a Christian as well as an athlete?

## THINGS TO DO

Give each student an envelope with several questions written on it. Inside each envelope place a surprise that they are not to have until the questions are all answered. When the questions on the envelope have been answered, they may see what the prize is. Talk about how this is an example of self-discipline.

Bring a copy of some laws (such as a driver education book). Talk about laws and why they are made. Why do we need to set up personal laws to live by?

Bring a toothbrush, face cloth, and a bar of soap. Make an object lesson on how we must discipline ourselves to use those things for our own well-being. Just as every

morning we must brush our teeth and wash our face, we must also read and pray. These things we learn to do for ourselves and must do them even though sometimes we don't feel like it.

Bring a bag of cookies or other treats and ask the students what would happen if they did not restrain themselves but ate all the treats. Make a parallel with our spiritual life—if we don't discipline our actions we soon become spiritually "sick."

## Answers for ANSWER

### Take Control!

Have you ever visited a ghost town? That's about all it's good for . . . visiting, looking it over and seeing what was and what could have been. The verse below compares a city to a person's spirit. Use the code to fill in the verse. If you don't want a "ghost town spirit" you had better have some self-control!

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