

# Life Coach: The Theology of Self-Discipline

Why? What? How?

Introduction: Self-discipline is the undisputed champion in every success story. The ability to deny the flesh while struggling toward a greater goal is the chief ingredient to fulfillment and achievement. Self-discipline, however, is a battle for everyone. It doesn't come easy for anyone. The difference is one's willingness to continue doing battle in order ultimately to win.

- I. Why is self-discipline so important? (The theology of Self-Discipline)
  - A. The Bible instructs Christians to practice self-discipline:
    1. "But the fruit of the Spirit is...temperance..." Gal. 5:23—Note the Holy Spirit produces temperance (self-control, self-discipline) as we yield to Him. Self-discipline, therefore, is a spiritual matter.
    2. "...add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance..." (II Peter 1:5, 6)
    3. Notice that yielding to the Holy Spirit produces temperance, but it is our responsibility to "add" temperance as well. Biblical self-discipline involves God's power and my obedience.
  - B. Paul exemplified self-discipline (I Cor. 9:24-27)
    1. Winning the race of life is not predetermined for a select few. Paul said, "So run, that ye may obtain." "Ye" is plural. In a footrace, there is one winner. By contrast, all Christians may be winners in life's race (24).
    2. Success requires temperance—self-discipline. Athletes know the secret. Christians, who have a higher motivation, should understand it as well (25).
    3. Paul had specific life goals toward which he directed his personal self-discipline (26). Everything either directs toward or detracts from a goal. Paul's goals were clear, so the pathway of self-discipline became obvious.
    4. Paul understood himself to be his greatest enemy. His greatest challenge was to channel himself into the accomplishment of his goals. Nothing stands between you and success except you!
    5. Paul practiced daily self-discipline. The words "keep under my body" literally mean "give myself a black eye." He "punched" himself into subjection toward his goals (27).
    6. Paul understood the consequences of laziness and self-indulgence—ultimate failure in the mission to which God had entrusted him.
  - C. All success hinges upon self-discipline.
    1. Everyone will suffer some pain: either the pain of self-discipline now, or the pain of regret later.
    2. Stephen R. Covey said, "The undisciplined are slaves to moods, appetites, and passions." Paul put it this way: "All things are

lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient (beneficial): all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (I Cor. 6:12).

3. Business Entrepreneur Mark Tyrell said:

Over the years I've come to see self-discipline as an invisible magic. You can't see, taste, or smell it, but its effects are huge. It can transform fat into slim, sag into buff, uninformed into expert, poor into rich, misery into happiness. It's the submerged part of the iceberg others don't see when they see your "genius."

4. "Natural talent counts for little unless it's supercharged by self-discipline." --Mark Tyrell

II. What is self-discipline?

A. Biblically, self-discipline involves active yielding to the Holy Spirit and Biblical authority.

1. "...yield yourselves unto God...and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13).
2. "...yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Romans 6:19).
3. The struggle to yield comes from the "flesh," the old sin nature that so often defeats the higher aspirations of the Spirit. Paul described this inner struggle in Romans 7:14-25—
  - a. God's law is "good," but all men—even Christians—have a carnal (fleshly) nature (14).
  - b. Christians find themselves doing fleshly things that in the Spirit they don't want to do. Conversely, we find ourselves failing to fulfill the promptings of the Spirit. This is the struggle: desiring the spiritual, but being defeated by the flesh (15-16).
  - c. The "flesh," a significant part of us all, has no inherent goodness. The spiritual "me" desires to do right, but the flesh "me" doesn't know how. That's where the Holy Spirit MUST intervene. (18-19).
  - d. The spiritual "me" is not in agreement with the flesh "me"—CONFLICT! Paul is not shirking personal responsibility; rather, he is describing the conflict, attributing his failure to HIS flesh (20).
  - e. Even our highest aspirations (spiritual aspirations of the inward man) are tainted by the presence of sin (22-23). Note the "law of sin" is "in my members," that is, my flesh.
  - f. Ultimate deliverance from the pull of the flesh will come when we are relieved of the physical body (24).
  - g. Paul was content to continue to strive against the flesh, even in the face of defeat. *He continued the struggle, recognizing the tension between flesh and Spirit. That is Biblical self-discipline!*