

THE GREATEST RULE



by
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Please open your Bibles to Proverbs chapter sixteen and verse thirty-two. I would like to preach a message entitled "The Greatest Rule."

A mighty man is still one who can rule his own spirit; and before a man can effectively rule others, he must learn how to rule himself.

In Proverbs 16:32, the Bible says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." In Proverbs 25:28, the Bible says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

The Scripture seems to imply that greater energy is required for self-rule than even for the rule of a city. It is greater to rule over your own desires, denying those desires that are wrong and yielding to those desires that are right, than it is to rule citizens.

In Judges 15:16, Samson said, "With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men." However, he could not control his own carnal lusts. He could carry a city gate on his back for almost 40 miles, but he could not resist Delilah.

Many preachers have managed a large church and preached astounding sermons but could not manage or master their own spirit.

Many athletes have dominated the field, who could bring home great fortunes, but who could not seem to control their own bodily cravings. They could not rule themselves.

How much more is this true of Christians in the spiritual realm! If it is true, then our battles are primarily spiritual, and they are. In Ephesians 6:12, the Bible says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rules of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Listen! You are involved in spiritual battles. The child of God, by the very nature of his new birth experience, is locked into battle with the devil and with satanic forces.

If it is true that secular men and women must have discipline; if it is true that even secular people cannot succeed without self-control; if it is true that unsaved athletes cannot be a good athletes if they cannot first control themselves how much more true it is that a child of God cannot be successful until he learns to exercise self-control, until he learns to rule over his own spirit!

We are going to notice three things: Number one, what does it mean to rule your own spirit? Number two, how does a person gain self-control? Number three, what is the reward of self-control?

The greatest rule is not the rule of a city, the rule of a church, the rule of a business, or the rule of an empire. The greatest rule is self-control. That is the testimony of Scripture.

Please notice number one: what does it mean to rule you own spirit? What does that mean? When the Bible talks about "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city," what is meant by "he that taketh a city"?

In Proverbs 16:32, the Bible says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

There are other ways of expressing the concept of ruling your own spirit. The Apostle Paul spoke of self-control, self-rule, as being temperate for a prize.

In I Corinthians 9:25, the Bible says, "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." The word "temperate" simply means "rigid self-control." He said they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.

He is talking about the kind of self-control that was practiced by an athlete with a view of winning a prize. An athlete governs everything he does in terms of winning the contest. He governs what he eats. He governs where he goes. He governs the length of his sleeping and the length of his workout. He governs everything he does. He disciplines himself with the prize in mind.

Therefore, self-control is, by this definition, doing whatever is legal and lawful to gain a claim at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is doing what you need to do so that you will not be ashamed at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Therefore, one definition of self-control is "controlling self to do that which will result in the praise of God at the Judgment Seat of Christ."

Listen! It is good to control yourself in light of the fact you are going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

By the way, are you living in the reality that one day you will stand before Christ and give Him an account of how you lived your life? You will give account of how you have lived from the very moment you embraced Him as your Personal Savior and Friend until the day you die.

The Bible is very clear on this. In Hebrews 9:27, it says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." In Romans 14:10, the Bible says, "...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." In Romans 14:12, it says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

With that in mind, don't you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord? Don't you want to hear Jesus Christ say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant?" Surely you do!

Here is another example of self-control. In I Corinthians 9:27, the Bible says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..." He is talking about this body. He said I keep under my body. That phrase literally means "to strike under the eye." It means to give one a black eye.

Do you know what Paul was saying? Paul was saying this: Self-control is the control that a boxer exercises when he knocks his opponent out and blackens his eye.

Paul so fought against the natural cravings of his body that he wanted to land a total knockout. He wanted to knock himself out rather than sin against God.

Then he used another phrase. He used the phrase "bring into subjection." He is referring to a General who would conquer a people and then bring those folks through the middle of town to demonstrate he was the boss and the people were his.

What is Paul saying? Paul is saying this. I am refusing to allow my body to control me. If I have to blacken the eye of my body, if I have to bring my body into subjection, that is what I will do.

Listen! Your body will tell you Wednesday night, "You are tired so stay home." Paul said, "I am not going to let my body tell me what to do."

Your body tells you, "Don't get up in the morning and have your devotions. You stay in bed for an extra 30 minutes;" and self-control says, "I am not going to let my body tell me what to do. I tell my body what to do."

What is self-control? Self-control is not letting your body tell you what to do. You are going to tell your body what to do. That is self-control.

In another place, Paul explains self-control in terms of restraint. In I Corinthians 14:32, the Bible says, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." In other words, a man who is filled with the Spirit can restrain himself.

It is restraining self from doing the wrong things at the wrong time. I am defining self-control. Remember!

In Romans 6:12, the Apostle Paul said, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Paul told the Romans that self-control is refusing to allow sin to dominate their lives.

The word "sin" here refers to the sin nature. The word "reign" means to reign as king. Therefore, self-control is telling the sin nature no. It is looking the sin nature right in the eye and saying, "You are not going to terrify me. You are not going to control me." Self-control is telling the sin nature no.

In Romans 8:13, the Bible says, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." It is dying to and killing the actions of the body. You are to die to self.

Let me ask you something. Are you prepared to kill what hinders you? Are you prepared to mortify that deed of the body that is hindering you from growing in grace? Therefore, self-control is death to self. It is dying to the tyranny of selfish desires.

In Mark 8:34, Jesus said, "...Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Taking up your cross is taking up an instrument of death. When Jesus said "take up your cross," he was saying, "exercise self-control." He was saying, "die to self." You need to say no to your own self-centered, selfish desires.

In James 1:26, the Bible says, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Therefore, according to James, self-control is bridling self. It is pulling self back. It is restraining self.

In Acts 24:16, the Bible says, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Just as an athlete works out day in and day out to get his body in shape, you are to work out. You are to work out keeping your conscience clean. If you are going to live a godly life, if you are going to live a clean life, you have to do it by discipline.

What does self-control mean then? How can you summarize all of this? Self-control simply means to discipline yourself to do what is right and what you ought to do.

Self-control is refusing to allow your body to tell you what to do. It is refusing to allow your carnal appetites and carnal lusts to tell you what to do. It is restraint. It is death to self. It is temperance. It is bridling your members. It is something you work at all the time.

For the Christian, it is going against the tide of your sin nature. It is swimming against the current. It is cutting across the grain. It is going contrary to your natural way. It is denying selfish desires. It is ruling yourself, rather than having your body or your circumstances or your own desires rule over you.

The child of God must go a step beyond this. Not only must he see that self-control is disciplining himself to do what is right, he must also see that the Christian life is not having God wave a magic wand over him.

The Christian life is not coming forward and saying some magic words at the altar. The successful Christian life boils down to a matter of disciplining yourself to do what you are supposed to do.

It is a matter of obedient living. For the Christian, it is even beyond this. The child of God must understand self-control in terms of the Holy Spirit who lives within. He that ruleth his spirit is actually the Christian who is controlling himself by submitting to the rule of the Holy Spirit as expressed in God's Word.

In Psalm 37:23, the Bible says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD..." If you were that good man, if you were that disciplined man, you would let God be in charge. And when God gives these marching orders, you will discipline yourself to obey Him.

In Psalm 141:3, the Bible says, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." He was asking God to help him do the right thing.

In Romans 8:13, the Bible says, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

I submit to you that discipline is hard. It is hard to discipline yourself. The most natural instinct is to just do what you feel like doing; to do what you want to do; to do what your body and flesh dictates to do.

The child of God has a tremendous advantage over the unsaved. He has the advantage of the Person and work of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God can enable you to do what is not the normal thing to do. That is why the Bible speaks of self-control or temperance in terms of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 5:22-23, the Bible says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance..." Self-control is that which the Holy Spirit produces in you as you yield yourself to Him.

I am simply saying this. If your body is in charge, I guarantee you that you are not filled with the Spirit of God. I don't care what talents you have. I don't care what prominence you might have in the local assembly. If your body is calling the shots, if you go by your feelings, you are not filled with the Holy Spirit of God because, when the Holy Spirit fills a man, one of the things He produces in that individual is self-control, self-rule, or temperance.

Don't you see? You are best in control of your emotions, your desires, your passions, and your nature when you are Spirit controlled.

The fruit of the Spirit is temperance. To be in self-control is to be under the rule of the Holy Spirit. It is to be doing what He says. The spirit filled Christian is the Christian who ruleth his own spirit.

It is disciplining yourself through self-denial and with restraint, and requiring yourself to obey what God wants.

What does it mean, he that ruleth his own spirit? It means to discipline yourself to do what you ought to do, and to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have noticed number one, what does it mean to rule your own Spirit? But notice number two, How does a person gain such self-control?

So let me ask you something. How does a person gain such self-control? Self-

control must be learned.

We are born sinners. That is not just a theological fact. That is the practical fact as well. You by nature do wrong. By nature, you do not do what is right. The only reason you do right stuff is because of the influence of the gospel generally and the influence of the Holy Spirit specifically.

If it were not for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life, if it were not for the gospel, you would be as wicked and lowdown as the unsaved.

We are all sinners; and when you were saved, you had something added. You have a new nature added but the old nature is still there. You still have the same old tendency to do wrong; and if you follow your natural inclinations, you are going to do wrong most of the time.

You do what is wrong naturally. You do not do the will of God naturally. You must learn to do what is right by yielding to the Holy Spirit and by following the clear commands of the Scriptures.

If you are going to be a student of the Word of God, you must learn to read the Bible. You must learn to study the Bible. If you are going to be a successful prayer warrior, you must learn to pray and discipline yourself to pray and keep at it. Somewhere along the way, you must discipline yourself to pray. If you are going to be a student of the Word, you must discipline yourself to read the Bible.

The child of God who gives is the one who disciplines himself to give. If you are a tither, it is because somewhere along the way you disciplined yourself so that every time you get a paycheck, at least 10% comes out and goes into the work of the local church. It is because you discipline yourself to tithe.

If you go to church regularly, you do so because you have disciplined yourself to go. It is not because the Holy Spirit picked you up and drove you to church.

If you are faithful to church, it is because, under the strength and help of the Holy Spirit, you have disciplined yourself to come to church Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night. In addition, if you do not come to church it is a problem of self-control.

If you are going to do right as a child of God, you must yield to the Spirit of God and follow His Word but you must discipline yourself to do what is right.

You must do right because it is right to do right because God tells you to do right because it is what a good Christian should do.

You ought to be a soul-winner because the Bible says you ought to be one. You ought to be a giver because the Bible says you ought to be one. You ought to pray because it is the right thing to do. In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "...That men ought always to pray..."

You ought to go to church because in Hebrews 10:24-25, the Bible says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

God's people have this obedience problem all fouled up. They think obedience is a feeling. Obedience is a decision that you make, and you carry it out based on self-control, based on self-discipline.

You say, preacher! How can I begin discipline? Self-control must be practiced consistently and with no dependence on circumstances or feelings. You are to do what you ought to do whether you feel like doing it or not.

If you will do right because it is right to do right, it will not be hard to do right. If you will move out of the realm of feelings as the basis and motivation to do your service, it will not be hard to do right.

If you say, you are going to do right because it is right to do right, that you are going to discipline yourself to do right, I promise you, after a while, you will have more feelings than you can handle. Feelings are not the motivation for service. If it is right to do right, if it is right to do what God tells you, if it is the will of God, then do it for that reason. Do not wait on inspiration to do right. If you have to feel something to read your Bible, you are not much of a Christian. If you have to tingle before you serve God, you are not much of a Christian. If you always have to have somebody pump you up, pat you on the back, and push you, you are not much of a Christian.

You need to start up again if you stop doing something that is right. You say, preacher! I use to read my Bible. What should I do? Start reading it again. I used to come to church on Wednesday night, but I have gotten out of the habit. What should I do? Start up again.

If something is right, and you stop doing it, then what you need to do is start doing it again. Well, I tried seventeen times. Try it again.

I have my devotions regularly. That is my practice. I cannot tell you how many times I started and stopped and started and stopped. Someone would preach on devotions, and I would get under conviction and feel guilt ridden. I would come forward and promise the Lord I will have devotions every day. It would last about a week. Finally, one day I said, it is right to have devotions so just do it. I am going to read the Bible. I am going to have my devotions even if I don't feel like it.

Just keep at it day after day after day after day. You might get through one verse. You might get through one chapter. You might get through fifteen chapters. You don't have devotions to feel good. You don't have devotions to get some experience. You have devotions because it is right to have devotions.

There are times when you don't feel like having devotions. Do it anyway. You don't give just because you feel good when you write your check. You ought to enjoy

giving. But whether you enjoy it or not is not the issue. The issue is, you do it because it is the right thing to do.

If you will learn to do right because it is right to do it; you do it because it is the right thing to do. God will give you all that you need.

I am simply saying this. Do right because it is always right to do right. Do right! Let God take care of all the problems that come your way. In I Peter 5:7, the Bible says, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

In Proverbs 24:16, the Bible says, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief."

What is the Bible saying? The Bible is simply saying this. If you start doing right and stop, start up again. Both the just man and the wicked man fell, but the just man falls seven times and rises up again; but the wicked man shall fall into mischief. Both fall. The difference is the righteous man keeps getting up. It is not so bad if you get out of habit of going to church, but get back in the habit.

How many of you got on a bicycle and rode it the first time? You ride, and you fall. Then all of a sudden, after a while, you are riding it. Why is that? Because you kept trying and falling.

Listen! Self-control must be related to your walk with God. The child of God cannot win this battle apart from fellowship with Jesus Christ.

For a Christian to have a shallow walk with God is foolish as the athlete who never works out, who never eats properly, who does not sleep regularly, and who abuses his body.

If you plan to be a successful Christian, you had better discipline yourself to do what is right. What is the alternative? In Proverbs 25:28, the Bible says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

Your walls are broken down. If you are exposed without walls, you will be exposed as easy prey. If you do not discipline yourself to do what is right, you will be an easy mark for the devil. You will be powerless against the flesh. You will drift toward the world and worldly pleasures with very little resistance.

If you are inconsistent and undisciplined, you will be spiritual casualties. If you do not learn self-control, there is no alternative. There is no other way.

If you do not learn to rule your own spirit, there is not a plan b. If you do not learn discipline, there is no plan b.

We have noticed number one, what does it mean to rule your own spirit? And number two, how does a person gain self-control? But notice number three, what is the reward of self-control?

So let me ask you something else. What is the reward for self-control? What will happen if you do this? It is the very opposite of broken walls and exposure and easy prey. In Proverbs 13:4, the Bible says, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

What is the Bible saying? The Bible is saying this. It is the disciplined man who gets the job done."

My friends, you have good ambitions. You have good dreams. You have big dreams. You have big plans. You have goal setting sessions; but because you are lazy, they are nothing but ideas on a piece of paper. Nevertheless, the Bible says, "but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." The disciplined man gets the job done.

Do you want to build a Sunday school class? It is going to take more than talent. It is going to take more than stories. It is going to take discipline.

The disciplined man has great strength. God uses the disciplined Christian. You can do what you must do. You will be strong in prayer. You will be vibrant in faith. You will be firm in your convictions.

Listen! God will not use the Christian who serves on a whim. He will not use the Christian who only serves in the sunshine. God wants Christians who will stick when others run.

Are you in command of what you think? Is your thought life under the rule of the Holy Spirit of God? Are you in command of where you go? Are you in command of the things you talk about? Are you in command of the deeds that you perform? In addition, are those deeds those thoughts, and places under the rule of the Holy Spirit, or are you the victor of your own passions?

Do you let your moods determine your behavior? Do you let feelings keep you from doing what you know you should do?

In Proverbs 25:28, the Psalmist said, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

If you will practice what I preached, your life will be different.

How is a Person Saved?

Salvation is all of God. God does the saving. Just take God at His Word and claim His salvation by faith. You will never be able to work your way into heaven. God does not have a scale in heaven whereby He weighs your good and bad works. That is a lie of the Devil. Romans 3:24; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:18; Romans 5:8.

Salvation is as simple as believing on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead. John 1:12, 3:16, 6:47; Acts 16:31; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 10:13.

Simply admit that you are a sinner and believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Saviour. You will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith. Romans 3:10, 23; I Corinthians 15:3-4.

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you some 2,000 years ago on Calvary's cross. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him more than to save you today.

Won't you go to Him right now in prayer and tell Him in your own words that you will trust Him as your Saviour? Or pray this simple prayer: Dear Lord, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for me and that He arose from the grave. Here and now I ask You to forgive me of my sin and save me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

If you prayed that simple prayer, I would like to hear from you. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (813) 760-4028.

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