

The Self Under Christ-Control  
Proverbs 25:28  
June 7, 2020

In the book, *The Three Edwards*, Thomas B. Costain described the life of Raynald III, a 14th century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means “fat.”

After a violent quarrel, Raynald’s younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room.

This would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother could not control his appetite, and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter.

When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: “My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave whenever he wants or wills.” Raynald stayed in that room for ten years and wasn’t released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined that he died within a year. He truly was a prisoner of his own appetite.<sup>1</sup> Discipline - being able to control oneself is very important in Christian life.

One of the books the late evangelical Christian writer, Jerry Bridges (1929-2016), wrote is called, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*. This book deals with sins, not obvious sins of our culture and society, but subtle sins of believers. The author calls these sins, “respectable sins.”

When a woman accused of adultery was brought before Jesus to be judged and condemned, Jesus said to the crowd, “Let anyone among you who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her.”<sup>2</sup> These words of Jesus are not just for the crowd who brought the woman before him, but for all humanity. It is an invitation to examine ones-self, to examine one’s own respectable sins.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/prisoner-of-his-appetite>

<sup>2</sup> John 8:7b.

What are respectable sins? They are the ones we tolerate. They are so common to all people that we just think of them as a part of inescapable human experience. We don't feel guilty about them. Even if we do feel guilty for a moment, it does not last, and we quickly forget them. No one calls us on them. We don't expect to answer for them on the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, they are sins we can be guilty of and yet we are still respected at church. The book deals with the sins of ungodliness, anxiety, frustration, discontentment, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience, irritability, anger, judgmentalism, envy, jealousy, sins of tongue and worldliness. All of them are subtle and not easily noticeable. Some are considered as nothing more than personality flaws or immature character but the author, Jerry Bridges, and the Bible calls "sins."

All of us deal with these issues. They may not seem serious, but these sins can lead to very damaging consequences. These respectable sins are so easy to get away with. This is why they are so hard to get rid of. But in order to mature in faith and spirit, we must confront them and deal with them.

I believe the foundation of all sins is lack of self-control. We have all tried to control our desires, greed, anger, frustration, selfishness, you name it. Most, if not all of us, have failed more often than not. It is not that we do not want to be holy, we do; and we tried to be. But our desire to be holy is just that, "desire." Over and over again we promised to 'never do it again,' but we did. Or we promised to 'do it every day,' but we didn't last more than a week. Living a holy life does not depend on our promises or our inadequate or insufficient effort.

So how do we develop self-control?

First of all, self-control can be taught. The late American psychologist, Walter Mischel (1930-2018), did an interesting study with preschoolers about self-control in 1970. He created a test to see how various preschoolers, ages between four and six, would respond to being left alone with a marshmallow for 15 minutes with instructions not to eat it. These children were given a promise that if they did not eat it, they would be given two marshmallows. It was reported later that the preschoolers who waited longest without eating it went on to have the higher SAT scores than the one who could not wait.<sup>3</sup> Those children did whatever they could to resist the temptation, covered their eyes, talk to themselves, sang songs, tried to sleep, etc. Some of the children were successful in resisting the temptation. In

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_marshmallow\\_experiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment)

other words, people can develop self-control by changing their thought about the items that strongly attract them.

This may be a good practice, but the Bible teaches us more than raw renunciation. It teaches us to turn our attention, not just for diversion, but to the source of real power that is outside of ourselves. The key to self-control is not inward, but upward.

This brings us to the second point that self-control is submitting ourselves under the control of Christ.

Self-control is NOT about bringing ourselves under our own control, but under the power of Christ. Self-control is multifaceted. It involves both controlling our behavior and restraining our impulses and emotions. Self-control is an issue of controlling our heart more than controlling our behaviors.

Paul, in his letter to Titus, writes that in the person of Jesus, “the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all, (and) training us” not just “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,” but “to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”<sup>4</sup>

Christian self-control is not bringing our bodily passions or desires or emotions under our own control, but under the control of Christ by the power of his spirit.

It is to have Christ’s heart, mind and spirit. Roberto de Vincenzo (1923-2017) was one of the greatest golfers in history. He was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1989. He had won 231 professional golf tournaments.

There is a story about de Vincenzo winning one of the tournaments and receiving his prize check. After smiling for the cameras, he went back into the clubhouse to prepare to leave. By the time he left, the parking lot was almost empty. As he walked to his car, a young woman approached him.

She congratulated him on his victory and then told him the story of her young child who was near death due to a serious illness. She said that she and her husband did not have the money to pay for the doctor’s and the hospital expenses.

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<sup>4</sup> Titus 2:11-12.

Touched by her story, de Vincenzo took out a pen and endorsed his winning check right there in the parking lot. “Make some good days for the baby,” he said, as he handed the check to the woman.

The next week de Vincenzo was having lunch at a country club when a PGA official came to his table. He said to him, “Some of the guys in the parking lot last week told me you met a young woman there after you won the tournament.” De Vincenzo nodded. “Well,” said the official, “I have news for you. She’s a phony. She’s not married. She does not have a sick baby. She cheated you, my friend.”

“You mean there is no baby who is dying?” said de Vincenzo.

“That’s right. There is no sick baby.” said the official.

“That’s the best news I’ve heard all week!” said de Vincenzo.

Instead of getting angry, he rejoiced for the fact that there is no sick baby. I believe his attitude is the attitude of Christ, generous and compassionate. He could have gotten very angry, but what would that do? Will it bring his check back? Who had greater problem, de Vincenzo or the woman? It is obvious, isn’t it? It was told that he was truly glad that the thief’s tragic story was not true.<sup>5</sup>

When we have Christ’s heart, mind and spirit, our “self” will be under the control of Christ. Self-control is a gift, produced in and through us by God’s spirit.

Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi by saying, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Let us allow the Holy Spirit to work within us so we may become Christ-like more and more.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.arcoc.com/2016/11/13/the-best-news/>