

Self-control and peace

What Does This Mean?

Self-control is a societal issue ([Proverbs 16:32](#)): lack of self-control leads to people not accepting limits on their behavior and harming others through their choices. Patience is one of the keys to self-control and involves actively experiencing the time we are in, not rushing on to the next thing. It is not a passive virtue.

Self-control is listed as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit ([2 Timothy 1:6-8](#)). Self-control is the right use of our power to direct our will with God's help. The Holy Spirit works within us as individuals and as a Christian community to develop self-restraint, self-discipline, and self-control in what we think, feel, and do. Self-control restricts some things in order to let other things flourish. It is a form of strength, and the Bible views a person lacking self-control as vulnerable, like a city with a hole in its protective wall ([Proverbs 25:28](#)).

Self-control is the exercise of inner strength under the direction of sound judgment that enables us to do, think, and say the things that are pleasing to God. Jerry Bridges

One area in which we need to exercise self-control is in relation to anger and frustration. Anger is often born of frustration: things don't happen quickly enough for us. Anger itself is not necessarily wrong, since it can focus on injustice and be the engine of change once channeled correctly. Jesus was angry with the money changers, with the disciples when they sent the children away ([Mark 10:14](#)), and with religious leaders who made rules more important than healing ([Mark 3:5](#)). But anger also often occurs when our self-interest has been challenged. The Bible is full of advice about anger: deal with it quickly ([Ephesians 4:26](#)); speak gently, and you will calm people down ([Proverbs 15:1](#)). Dealing with selfishness cures much anger.

The first thing to understand about anger is that it isn't always a bad thing. Many people, especially Christians, have the mistaken notion that anger is intrinsically evil. As a result, they feel needless guilt. . . . The issue of self-control is the question of how we deal with anger. Violence, tantrums, bitterness, resentment, hostility, and even withdrawn silence are all sinful responses to anger. R. C. Sproul

Self-control also curbs other vices, such as greed, lust, slander, and gluttony. Jesus's life and teaching embodied God's peace (shalom), which is about wholeness and just relationships and not just a lack of conflict. Biblical peace comprises harmony in relationships, minds, bodies, and in the wider world. It is a positive peace in which people flourish. That experience of the peace of God is a foretaste of his peace to come (John 14:27). Having peace does not mean that life will be easy—sometimes we have to disturb an unjust false peace to create a just one. But having received peace from God, we are called to live in peace as far as it lies with us (Romans 12:18).

Contentment is the opposite of dissatisfaction and discontent, which are about wanting more and more (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Contentment is not complacency; it involves shifting the focus from what we don't have to what we do have (1Timothy 6-7) and from our desire for more to appreciation and thankfulness. Contentment has its roots in believing life is a gift and not a right.

What Does This Mean in School?

Anger, peace, patience, and contentment are issues that arise in many subjects, from history and geography to science and design.

- In English, draw attention to stories, poems, and drama that explore patience, contentment, anger, and peace.
- Create a peaceful atmosphere for teaching and learning about peace, patience, and contentment.
- There are big questions to be explored, such as "Should we design ads that create discontent and more and more consumption?" and "Does this peace treaty create peace in biblical terms?"
- Look at the role of self-control in history, writing, civics, and sports.
- Draw attention to different understandings of anger and peace. For example, you might give a range of examples and ask students to create criteria for distinguishing between the different types of anger and peace.

Does some of the material you teach sometimes stir up righteous anger? Think of a time when what was being taught made students angry; was it because it highlighted injustice or because it challenged their self-interests in some way?



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