



## The Issue of Self-Control in 1 Cor 7:9; the Classical & Biblical Views of Restraint; the Problem of “Burning” in 1 Cor 7:9: Those without Restraint Should Marry

**1 Corinthians 7:9** - If they [ the unmarried and widows (v. 8) ] do not have self-control [ οὐκ ἐγκρατεύομαι, *ouk enkrateuomai* ], let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn [ πυρόω, *puroō* ].

1. The phrase “do not have self-control” is introduced by the negative particle *ouk* followed by the verb *enkrateuomai* and refers to “lack of self-restraint.”
2. This word has an interesting development which is documented by:

Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2:339-42:

**ἐγκρατεύομαι (*enkrateuomai*)**. The word group ἐγκρατ- (*enkrat-*) takes its sense from the stem κρατ- (*krat-*), which denotes power or lordship, and which expresses the power of lordship which one has either over oneself or over something. (p. 339)

It thus means “to have power or dominion over all things and over oneself,” i.e., “to be inwardly strong.” The opposite is ἀκρατής (*akratēs*), “one who has no inner strength, who is undisciplined.”

ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) plays an important role in the philosophical ethics of classical Greece and Hellenism. (p. 340)

It is reckoned a cardinal virtue by Socrates, Xenophon, and Aristotle devotes a full section to it in *Ethica Nicomachea* (*Nicomachean Ethics*). The concept of ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*), behind which stands the ideal of the free and independent man, of the man who is under no control but who freely controls all things and who in self-restraint maintains his freedom in face of the θαυλαί ἡδοναί (*thaulai hēdonai*: festival of sensual pleasures) which would deprive him of it, achieves its ethical significance from the humanistic understanding of life which has freedom as its goal. (pp. 340-41)

ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) is highly estimated by Philo. For him it means superiority to every desire. This superiority is expressed in restraint. It relates to food, sex, and the use of the tongue.

In view of all this, it is striking how small a part is played by the term in biblical religion. In the (Septuagint) the term implies restraint from sexual and other excesses. (p. 341)

In the list of virtues in Galatians 5:(22)-23 ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) is the opposite of πορνεία (*porneia*: sexual immorality: fornication/adultery), ἀκαθαρσία, (*akatharsia*: defilement of the soul due to sexual permissiveness), ἀσέλγεια (*aselgeia*: varied perversions associated with sexual sins), ... μέθαι (*methai*: alcohol abuses), κῶμοι (*kōmoi*: bacchanalias) in verses 19-21. Enkratite tendencies are perhaps present in view of their open occurrence in 1 Corinthians 7:9 (which) refers to sexual restraint. (p. 342)

3. The point being made is that the concept of having no self-control was considered to be the absence of character and virtue among the writers of the ancient world. Virtue was the capacity to overcome the desires of the flesh by self-restraint whether for food, sex, or gossip.
4. Kittel uses the word “Enkratite” which comes into the English to define those who are self-disciplined but also recognizes its origins in church history:

*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v.:*



**Encratite** *len' cra-tītel*. Self-disciplined, being in possession of power. In early church history, one of a sect that abjured marriage and the use of wine and meat: also called *Continent*.

**Encraty**. Self-restraint; abstinence in all matters.

5. It is noted that the virtue of *enkrateia* is used seldom in biblical writings. It is used only three times and its derivatives only three more.
6. The reason suggested for the Holy Spirit's spare use of this idea of an inner-governing virtue concludes Kittel's article:

**Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:342:**

It is significant that biblical religion finds so little place for the concept of ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) which in the Hellenistic and Greek world is so essentially ethical. The reason for this is that biblical man regarded his life as determined and directed by the command of God. There was thus no place for the self-mastery which had a place in autonomous ethics. Again, belief in creation cut off the way to asceticism. It saw in the world with its gifts the hand of the Creator. Finally, the gift of salvation in Christ left no place for an asceticism which merits salvation.

7. This is an extremely important point for believers to understand. The concept of ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) in this context has to do with self-control in the area of abstinence. The power to manage what Paul refers to as "burning" is provided by the filling of the Holy Spirit plus doctrine resident in the soul.
8. Without these two sources of power, the individual is going to be overwhelmed by the passions and desires associated with sex. If children are denied access to these sources of power while at the same time given the notion that they will inevitably submit to sexual temptations then there is no reason for them to consider ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) which simply means continence or abstinence.
9. The issue Paul is addressing in verse 9 is the problem facing some members of the church at Corinth. Some were very ascetic and considered any physical involvement with sex as sinful. Others such as those in verse 9 were trying to line up with this idea but were having extreme difficulty doing so.
10. Those who had allowed themselves to become involved in assuaging their passions and desires obviously lacked the power to execute the Classical virtue of *enkrateia*, or self-control.
11. What they needed was the integrity to abstain but their facilitated behavior patterns would overwhelm the ministries of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of biblical mandates.
17. As a result they were burning, the present passive infinitive of the verb **πυρῶω, puroō**, which refers to the intensity of their sexual passions and desires.
18. *Puroō* is a derivative of the noun **πῦρ, pur** which is the word for "fire." *Puroō* is used by Paul in the passive voice to indicate that this "burning" is a physical condition whose action is produced by emotions associated with the sex drive.
18. This "burning" can be overwhelming without doctrine and acted upon prior to marriage would destroy both the spiritual and physical lives of believers at Corinth. Therefore Paul instructs them to marry so that their passions and desires can be satisfied legitimately.



19. The federal schools have systematically constructed an environment in which young boys and girls are forbidden the spiritual input that could serve as a source of strength in restraining these influences.
20. But by outlawing the teaching of biblical principles regarding marriage with emphasis on the soul then the students are only instructed in mechanics which provide for them a tutorial on how to act on their passions and desires.
21. Consequently, proponents of sex-education benefit from a self-fulfilling prophecy: since the children are going to be sexually active then they need to know how to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.
22. You may argue that the school is not the place to teach Judeo-Christian theology and rightly so. But the fact still remains that they are left with a situation in which they can only teach half the subject.
23. Knowing this, parents must recognize the danger zone in which their children are placed and seek every measure to avoid their involvement in such classes or see to it they get the other half at home.
24. Since the federal schools will continue with their instruction in perversion then the series on right man-right woman followed by the exposition of Song of Solomon are imperative for children to study beginning at approximately age 12.
25. Knowledge of the spiritual aspects of an intimate relationship must precede instruction in the physical so that as the child grows to adulthood he or she will be prepared not only to identify their right person but also have the doctrine to restrain their passions and desires until marriage.
26. The Shulammite and the Shepherd are prepared for marriage in every way. They have achieved soul rapport, they anticipate sexual harmony, and they have the maturity to establish the corporate institution of a home.
27. This rapport of souls is evident as the Shulammite appeals in her thinking to her Shepherd Lover:

**SOS 1:7 - [SW] "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves ..."**