

**GOOD CITIZENSHIP II:
SELF-GOVERNANCE**
(PROVERBS 16:32)

I. We, the Citizens

II. Whoever Is Slow to Anger

- A. Proverbs 16:32 has two parts that mirror each other.
- B. The proverb is praising a particular kind of person—*the person who is slow to anger*. Being slow to anger is a virtue. Being quick to anger is bad.
- C. To further exalt the virtue of being slow to anger, the proverb says that the person who “is slow to anger is better than the mighty...”
 - 1. The Lord is not condemning physical strength, financial power, or any other kinds of powers.
 - 2. Instead, the Lord is teaching us that people who are mainly physically strong but have no control over their inner lives are undesirable types of people. They are not to be emulated.
- D. The essential thrust of this statement, the basic ethical principle from this Scripture, is that self-mastery is a virtue that all people should aspire to gain. The Lord God wants us to prize self-mastery.
- E. What ought to be most important about a person is not how accomplished he or she is, but what kind of a human being he or she is, what kind of interior life he or she possesses.
 - 1. In other words, this proverb is addressing the same issue as Proverbs 4:23. It’s addressing the human heart and our need to guard it and to cultivate it.
- F. Self-mastery is a great virtue that God calls all human beings to acquire.
- G. The apostle Peter calls us to “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge” (2 Pet 1:5). Self-mastery is surely one of those virtues.
- H. To inspire us to take this virtue work seriously, God praises it.
- I. Proverbs 16:32 teaches us that a person with lots of strength but little control over his interior desires isn’t that strong at all!
- J. The Lord wants his children to be mindful of what goes on inside our hearts. He wants his children to be careful about the secret values and emotions we harbor inside of us.

III. He Who Rules His Spirit

- A. The second part to this proverb reinforces the message of the first: “and he who rules his spirit [is better] than he who takes a city.”
 - 1. “He who rules his spirit” = the one who “is slow to anger...”
 - 2. Self-mastery and slowness to anger are closely related virtues.
 - 3. If one is able to rule one’s own spirit, one will be slow to anger.
- B. Just as being slow to anger is better than being mighty, ruling one’s own spirit is better than being able to conquer a city.
- C. This puts our society’s high esteem for winning, strength, success, and wealth in proper perspective. Proverbs 16:32 teaches us that there are, in fact, things that are more praiseworthy than those.
- D. The one who is not enslaved to his darker emotions or desires, and able to say “no” to his sinful appetites and “yes” to the Word of God is far superior to the successful warrior, athlete, or businessman who has no such control over himself.
- E. The cultivation of self-mastery, self-governance, or self-rule is a good work that God wants his children to do.
- F. Self-mastery is a mark of good citizenship, because it is a quality of a good human being.
- G. When citizens practice self-mastery, political leaders can trust them with more freedom.
 - 1 Timothy 1:9: “understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,”

IV. Fear Leads to Anger

- A. How do we acquire this virtue? How do we get better at being slow to anger and better able to master ourselves?
- B. In order to develop self-governance, we have to recognize the roots of our anger and the darker emotions that make us do foolish things.
- C. This proverb is prodding us toward deeper self-examination and self-understanding. Self-governance requires self-knowledge. We cannot improve at being slow to anger if we don’t try to understand what it is that sets us off and why.
- D. Proverbs 16:32 is not condemning anger.
 - 1. There are things to be rightfully angry about. We should be angry, I think, when we see people being bullied or oppressed. So what this proverb is condemning specifically is not anger.
 - 2. Rather, it is *quickness* to anger that is at issue.

3. Anger is a destructive force.
 4. If we are angry over the wrong things, we can end up hurting people.
- E. We start gaining mastery over our anger by recognizing what it is that generates our anger.
1. *Fear* is often at the root of our anger.
 - a. We get angry because we feel that some aspect of our survival is at stake.
 - b. Once again, we are reminded of the wise words of Hebrews 2:15, which tells us that “through fear of death [we were] were subject to lifelong slavery.”
 - c. When anger arises, it’s often because we fear for our lives.
 2. Closely related to the fear of death is *the need to be right*.
 - a. If we are afraid of death, then it absolutely matters that we are right, that we win, and that we have some sort of power over our opponents.

V. Christ Our Refuge

- A. If the fear of death (Heb 2:15) is the dark energy behind our rash anger and other destructive emotions (greed, lust, anxiety, jealousy, bitterness, etc.), the way we gain self-mastery is by silencing the fear of death that rages secretly in our hearts. And we do this by fleeing to the only enduring Source of peace that God has provided for us—our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- B. Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.”
1. Jesus is where the name of the LORD is. Jesus is the new Temple where God has placed his Name.
 2. Since Jesus is God in human flesh, Jesus is the name of the LORD.
- C. Psalm 18:2 invites us to find our refuge in the Lord Jesus:
- Ps 18:2: “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”
- D. Psalm 73:26 promises us:
- Ps 73:26: “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
- E. Self-control is the one of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Gal 5:22-23: “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
- F. We receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ.

- Gal 3:2: “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”
- G. Too often, we take refuge in other things.
 - Entertainment
 - Food
 - Acquiring knowledge
 - Work and career
 - Sports and physical exercise
- H. While these projects can distract us from the fear of death, they cannot remove it.
- I. Only the Lord Jesus removes our fears and grants us self-mastery through union with him and his life-giving work on our behalf.
 1. The Lord Jesus died for our sins so that we can be set free from the curse of God’s law and his avenging wrath.
 2. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead so that we can be justified in God’s sight (Rom 4:25).
 3. The Lord Jesus ascended into heaven on our behalf so that our future is forever secured in him.

Good citizenship requires people who can rule themselves. But the person who is slow to anger and rules his spirit well is the one who has come to the end of himself and rests completely in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that God will supply his every need according to his riches in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19). This person is set free from fear and is able to go about his days, ruled by the peace that comes from God (Phil 4:7) and devoted to pouring out his life in loving service to others. Self-mastery is the product of having the Spirit of Jesus Christ in us. All this is to say, good citizenship requires Jesus Christ.