The Doctrine of Self-Government

"The Wise Person Governs Himself Before Governing Others"

This principle expresses one of the foundational truths of biblical wisdom, moral philosophy, and effective leadership. While the sentence itself is not a direct biblical quotation, it accurately summarizes a broad biblical theme: **a person who cannot govern his own character, desires, and conduct is not prepared to govern others well.**

In Scripture, leadership begins with mastery of the self under God's rule.

I. Definition

Self-government is the ability to direct one's thoughts, emotions, desires, speech, and actions according to wisdom and righteousness rather than impulse or selfish ambition.

The principle means:

Before exercising authority over others, a leader must first exercise disciplined authority over himself.

This is not merely self-control in a psychological sense; it is self-control shaped by reverence for God and moral responsibility.

II. Biblical Foundation

Several passages express this principle directly or indirectly.

Proverbs 16:32

"Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city."

The proverb compares two victories:

- Conquering a city (external success)
- Conquering oneself (internal success)

The second is presented as the greater achievement.

Proverbs 25:28

"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control."

A city without walls was vulnerable to attack. Likewise, a person without self-control is vulnerable to destructive impulses and external pressures.

Luke 16:10

Jesus teaches that faithfulness in small responsibilities prepares a person for greater responsibilities.

The principle extends naturally to leadership:

Small victories over self prepare one for larger responsibilities toward others.

1 Timothy 3

When describing qualifications for church leaders, the apostle **Paul the Apostle** emphasizes qualities such as:

- Self-control
- Temperance
- Good reputation
- Faithfulness
- Orderly family leadership

These qualifications focus first on personal character before public leadership.

III. Why Self-Government Comes First

1. Character Shapes Leadership

Leadership amplifies character.

If selfishness governs the leader:

Authority becomes exploitation.

If wisdom governs the leader:

Authority becomes service.

Power reveals what already exists in the heart.

2. Internal Disorder Produces External Disorder

A leader whose inner life is marked by:

- Anger
- Greed
- Pride
- Fear
- Envy

will often spread those traits through decisions and relationships.

By contrast, inward peace and integrity tend to foster stable and just leadership.

3. Self-Government Builds Credibility

People are more likely to trust leaders whose actions align with their words.

Integrity creates moral authority beyond formal position or title.

IV. The Kingdom Begins Within

Jesus consistently emphasized inward transformation.

He taught that evil actions arise from the heart, and that genuine righteousness flows from an inwardly renewed life.

Therefore:

The Kingdom is first established in the heart.

Only then can it influence families, communities, and societies.

V. Five Areas of Self-Government

1. Government of the Mind

The wise person disciplines:

- Thoughts
- Beliefs
- Imagination
- Judgment

Instead of allowing fear or falsehood to dominate, the mind is renewed toward truth.

2. Government of Speech

Wisdom is reflected in words.

The wise learn:

- When to speak
- When to remain silent
- How to encourage
- How to correct without cruelty

Speech reveals the condition of the heart.

3. Government of Emotions

Self-government does not suppress emotions but directs them appropriately.

The wise person learns to manage:

- Anger
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Joy
- Grief

Emotions become servants rather than masters.

4. Government of Desires

Human desires are powerful but require discernment.

Wisdom orders desires according to what is good rather than allowing immediate gratification to dictate decisions.

5. Government of Actions

Ultimately, wisdom is demonstrated through conduct.

Daily choices reflect whether a person is governed by wisdom or impulse.

VI. Solomon as an Illustration

Solomon began his reign with humility, asking God for wisdom rather than wealth or military success.

This reflects the principle:

Inner wisdom precedes effective governance.

However, later in life, Solomon's accumulation of wealth, political alliances, and many marriages illustrates how failure in self-government can undermine even extraordinary gifts.

His life serves as both an example of wisdom and a warning about the consequences of neglecting disciplined character.

VII. Jesus as the Perfect Model

Jesus Christ demonstrates complete self-government.

He consistently showed:

- Obedience under temptation
- Patience under opposition
- Compassion toward the vulnerable
- Courage in suffering
- Faithfulness to the Father's will

His authority flowed from perfect alignment with God's purposes rather than from self-assertion.

VIII. Leadership Applications

A leader who governs himself:

- Keeps promises.
- Accepts correction.
- Admits mistakes.
- Exercises restraint.
- Treats others fairly.
- Uses authority responsibly.
- Serves rather than dominates.

Such leadership creates trust and stability.

IX. The Progression of Wise Leadership

A helpful sequence is:

1. Reverence for God
2. Self-examination
3. Self-discipline
4. Wisdom
5. Integrity
6. Trustworthiness
7. Stewardship
8. Leadership
9. Service
10. Lasting influence

Each step builds on the previous one.

X. Theological Summary

The statement **"The wise person governs himself before governing others"** expresses a central biblical conviction: authentic leadership begins with inward formation. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that wisdom is not merely intellectual knowledge but a way of life characterized by reverence for God, moral integrity, and disciplined character. Self-government—governing one's thoughts, words, desires, emotions, and actions under God's authority—prepares a person to exercise authority over others with justice, humility, and compassion. In this vision, leadership is not first about controlling others but about faithfully stewarding one's own life before God.