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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

July 16, 2017

Who, Why and How We Obey

1 Peter 1:13-17

Prayer: *Father, again we just thank you that you are faithful and you are good and you are our Lord and our Savior. You have provided for us in so many different ways, not the least of which is this very building that we're able to sit in. Just the fact that we can freely gather, we thank you for that faithfulness. We thank you also for the word that you've given us. We thank you, Lord, that it is our guide to our lives and again we pray this morning as we have the privilege of opening it up, that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit. He alone makes this make sense, he alone gives this meaning and we pray that it would be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we're looking at 1 Peter and 1 Peter 1, the scripture we're going to be looking at this morning, 13 through 17, opens up with the word "therefore". And I was always told that when you come across the word "therefore" in scripture, you're supposed to ask yourself what is it there for. And it's there because Peter has spent a great deal of time previously telling us that the prophets

of old who had received God's truth piece by piece and bit by bit, that they longed to have the whole picture that we now have. But as Peter says of these prophets back in verse 12, he says: *They were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.* Well, Peter was one of those very prophets that were preaching the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, and the gospel that he preached is about the glory that we bring to God simply by living out our lives as his children. I said we need to understand that while we are living out our ordinary lives that extraordinary things are happening all around us. Angels are watching us. And we're demonstrating the glory of God in the way we live out these ordinary lives. Peter speaks about living our lives "coram deo" which means under the gaze of God. And it's realizing that every single thing that we do in this life is a reflection of the grace and the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ within us. Or not.

Peter is now inviting us to take some of the practical measures required so that we could serve our times as we've been served in the past. This is the scripture that we're looking at this morning. This is *1 Peter 1:13-17*. He says: *Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be*

brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

Well, Peter lived out his time in the first century. We're now living ours in the 21st century and he says: *Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.* Well, isn't fear unbiblical? I mean, it's said that one of the most frequently stated commands in all of scripture is the command to fear not. We know Jesus said many, many, many times, this is *John 14:27*, this is emblematic of what he said. He said: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* So have we finally found a verified contradiction in scripture? I mean look at what we have here. We have Jesus clearly saying, *"do not be afraid."* And we have Peter also in scripture, saying, *live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.* Okay. So which one is it? Well, the answer is there are many different types of fears, some of which are good and some of which are not good. And the fears that Jesus spoke against, they always involved a lack of trust or

faith in God's ability or God's goodness. It was those fears that Jesus commanded us to work against. Now those fears that Jesus spoke of as legitimate have to do with those who are not yet reconciled to God. And yes, Jesus is quite clear in stating that that fear in that circumstance is entirely and completely appropriate. I mean Jesus made that clear in *Luke 12:5*. This is what he said: *"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."* See, it is that fear of offending a holy God that can literally save your soul. That fear is an extraordinary gift and it's given to very few. I mean you and I know the vast majority of the folks that you and I know have no fear whatsoever of God. They have no fear despite all the warnings that Jesus gave. Peter in our text this morning is speaking of a very different kind of fear. It's a good fear. It's a fear that comes from a right relationship with God. *1 John 4:18* says: *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* See, God says perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment and Christians alone understand that God is indeed fearful and that it is indeed according to scripture a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And we know the reason for that fear. And again as the scripture says, *because fear has to do with punishment.* But

as Christians we know precisely where that fear and punishment came from and we know where it went. The fear comes from judgment which all of us know deep, deep down is awaiting every one of us. And the punishment we also know fell not on us but on Christ who took our punishment for us. John in that letter is writing to Christians who haven't fully grasped the extent of the payment that Christ made on their behalf. I mean if you are a child of God, you have no reason whatsoever to have any fear of God and it's because God has already taken your punishment.

So then according to Peter, what is this reverential fear that we're supposed to be living in? Well, think of it this way: I mean have you ever had a party for somebody that you deeply loved? Have you ever offered to cook somebody a meal or maybe take them out to dinner or done something lovely for them to show them how much you care for them? Well, if that's ever happened in your life, you know what it's like to work hard on a party because you are afraid that it's not going to turn out great or to be afraid that the restaurant or the meal that you prepared is not going to be as spectacular that you thought it was going to be. You're afraid, but you're afraid that your loved one is going to be disappointed. You know, that's a fear. I mean that, too, is about being afraid, but I think you can see right off the bat that it's an entirely different type of fear. I mean you already know that

the person loves you and cares for you and your fear is based on not disappointing them. That's exactly what Peter is talking about when he speaks about reverential fear. It's a love for God that is so great that your greatest fear is to disappoint him. You have no fear in the sense of the idea of punishment. Instead you have a fear that you will fall short or disappoint someone who you know already loves you dearly. We have no need to fear because we know that our punishment already fell and it fell on Jesus. So our fear is not that God is going to get me, it's fear betraying or disappointing our Lord by disobeying his commands. And that's a powerful motivation.

As we look at our text this morning, we see that it has five different commands. One, prepare your minds; two, be self-controlled; three, set your hope on grace; four, do not conform to the old evil desires; and five, be holy. Now I mean they all sound simple enough but so do New Year's resolutions and you know we make them and then we break them. So how is this any different? Well, I think you need to consider verse 14 of our text this morning. It says this: *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* If you notice how verse 14 starts, it refers to us as "obedient children." And this goes back to Peter's introduction when he refers to every single child of God as being given by the power of the Holy Spirit in this

brand new will to obey. Remember back, this was three weeks ago we talked about Peter's introduction. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.* What he's saying is when you're saved, when you become a child of God, God removes this heart of stone from you and he replaces it with a heart of flesh and that heart of flesh has within it this drive toward obedience, this desire to obey that was not there before. I mean we still sin because we are sinners, but one thing as God's own sheep we now have and that is this desire to obey. The problem is is that desire is not enough.

Let me give you an example about another group of people who took lightly God's call to obedience. They had desire but they consistently disobeyed. This is back in the Old Testament. This is back in the book of Joshua, and Moses has just died and the leadership is being transferred from Moses to Joshua. And Joshua has seen it all, I mean, he's seen the wandering in the wilderness, he's seen the disobedience, he's seen the grumbling, the lack of trust, the lack of faith, for 40 years the Israelites had wandered around in circles in the desert because they failed to trust God implicitly. And along with that failure to trust came a failure to obey. So Joshua's assembled all of the people and he's giving them

God's choices. This is what he says. This is *Joshua 24:13*. He's speaking for God. He says: "So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God." So far so good. You got plenty of godly desire here, but listen to how Joshua responds. This is verse 19: Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you

*after he has been good to you." But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. See, the People are telling Joshua, "We will serve the LORD," and Joshua says in response, "Who are you kidding?" It's not like I haven't seen what's been going on not last 40 years. He said that because he knew these people very well and he knew that they typically overpromised and under delivered, and guess what? So do we. Our hearts may be willing but our hearts are also very unreliable. And just like the people that Joshua was addressing, we think obedience is far simpler and easier than it really is. God says in *Matthew 15*: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."*

So we ask ourselves this morning, how are we any different from these people? How do we match up our lips and our hearts? I mean the successful Christian life centers around obedience and yet obedience seems to be one of the hardest things for us to come by. Folks say, well, you can't live the Christian life in the flesh, I mean, we can't do it on our own. That's absolutely true. But how do we live and obey God in the spirit? How do we make obedience our default setting? Well, first we have to understand who we obey, then we have to understand why it is we obey, and finally we

have to understand how we obey if that's what we need to understand what it means understand what it means to be called what Peter says obedient children.

So first we have to examine who it is we obey. This is one of the most important areas of our human experience and it's also one of those areas that is most fraught with danger because it includes this idea of free will, the idea that we are free to obey or disobey whomever we choose. Is that true? Does man have free will? Well, it all depends on how you define "free will." We have choices, to be sure, but do choices equal freedom? You know Baskin-Robbins, they love to boast that they have 31 flavors of ice cream and if I said to you, "Hey, I'm going to take you out to Baskin-Robbins, and I want you to understand, you have complete freedom to choose whichever one you'd like, vanilla or chocolate." You might say to me, "But that's not real freedom, I mean, there's 29 other flavors that are available to anybody who wants to choose whatever flavor he wants to choose that I no longer can choose from." Well, if I told you you're a hundred percent free to choose vanilla or chocolate, I am offering you a choice, but it's not a free choice. You see, we think we have freedom simply because we have some choices. But what if we don't have the freedom to make any of the other 29 other choices and what if one of those choices is the one that we really should be choosing? You know, Adam

originally had the freedom to make any choice that he wanted but one: He could not eat of the fruit of the tree. And when he disobeyed his free will, totally free will collapsed into a fallen nature that now shaped his choices for him. None of us know what it is like to be totally free to choose because none of us since Adam has been born without sin. I mean do we still have choices? Well, of course we do, but sin now narrows our choices to those within the scope of our nature, and our nature is now fallen. I mean we've really lost our free will and we don't even know it. God says even though we have the appearance of choice we are now bound by our natures to choose against him. Listen to what he says in *Romans 8:7*. He says: *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* And *1 Corinthians 2:14* says: *The person out the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.* You see, of all the human beings who've ever existed, only Adam, Eve and the Lord Jesus Christ lived lives unfettered by a spirit that was hostile to God. And Adam and Eve gave up that freedom. It was Jesus Christ who came to earth to win it back for us. But that fallen spirit is now in every one of us at birth. We call it original sin. It's why children don't have to be taught how to be selfish and self-centered. We know they

have those skills naturally. We know they are born with them and that parenting seeks to shape and mold the spirit that if left to itself we know is going to produce a monster. And that's someone committed to obeying only one voice and that's his. Original sin is why we have crime, it's why we have wars, it's why we have prisons and it's also why God himself became one of us. He came to rescue us from the curse of our own choices and to ransom us with his blood. See, as sons and daughters of Adam, we still have choices but we just no longer have the natural ability to make the right choices. Paul put it this way in *Romans 7:19*, he says: *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing.* Paul almost sounds like he's describing some kind of Frankenstein robot. We ask, well, is that me, too? Is that how I work? I mean we know we're different from the animals, I mean, the animals have no choices. Squirrels do what they're going to do and snakes do what they're going to do, imagine a squirrel and a snake deciding we're going to trade places today. As a squirrel, I'm going to act like a snake; and as a snake, I'm going to act like a squirrel. You can't even imagine it, I mean it couldn't even possibly be, because we understand that animals are basically biologically preprogrammed robots. They can't make those kind of decisions. They don't have those kind of choices, but we can choose. We can choose to do right or wrong and so we do have choices. Well, doesn't that mean that we have free will? Again,

it doesn't work that way. I mean, I still have lots of choices, and so it's easy for me to think that I still have lots of freedom. But think about something as simple as food. I mean I can readily see when it comes to something like food, I can choose how and what and where and when I'm going to eat, but I can't choose not to eat, I mean that is if I want to stay alive. It's a physical fact of life. In the same way I can make individually good and moral decisions in my life but I can't choose to stop sinning now matter how much I might want to, and that's a spiritual fact of life.

You know I've done this little test on numerous occasions, so bear with me if you've heard this before but it's to illustrate my point. What I ask people to do is I'd like you to do me a favor and everybody please raise your right hand for me. Would you do that? Raise your right hands, everybody. Very good. You can put it down. Now here's what happened. When I asked you to raise your right hand, you unconsciously sent a message from your brain down a neural pathway in your arm commanding the muscles of your arm to raise it and lift it up. And everybody did that because unless you have some kind of physiological problem, we have control over our limbs. But now if I was to modify that request and say now what I'd like you to do next is remain sinless for the next 24 hours. I think we know that there's nobody here who could confidently agree with that request. I mean you can command your flesh; not so your

spirit. And that's because we're not fully free from sin. I mean Paul knew that in his flesh his freedom was a mirage, that there was this force within him called sin and that it compelled him. This is what he said in *Romans 7*. He said: *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

What Paul is saying is that his fallen nature is a slave to sin. We think we have free will because we have lots of free choices, but choice isn't freedom. Now I've often given the illustration of my pet parakeet. I used to have a pet parakeet. Occasionally I needed to clean his cage and get him out of the cage, and I'd reach in it and he absolutely hated being captured, so I'd reach in his cage and if I went north, he would go south; if I went east, he would go west. He'd do whatever he can to avoid me. We played that game for a while until eventually I caught him. But I think

of that parakeet in that cage and it's a good illustration of our freedom and sin. Because you see, the parakeet's still got choices. He has the choice to go north or south or east or west, but he's still inside a cage. We've got choices as well but we are still inside a cage, and the cage is called original sin. That is until God tears off the roof of that cage and literally pulls us out into his freedom. That's what Christ was offering. That's why Matthew's gospel says in *Matthew 20:28*, he says: *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Well, stop and think about that for a second. You don't ransom a free people. And the only truly free people in the entire world are those who have already been ransomed. Those are born again believers in Jesus Christ. See the deal is this: The rest of the world is in prison and it doesn't know it. I mean to a man or a woman, we think like Paul thought: *Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.* And in fact only those who are born again who have had their ransom paid in full by Christ, only they have the ability to choose unfettered by this unconscious slavery to sin. *1 John 5:19* says: *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* I mean that's a fact. The problem is the whole world doesn't believe it. It blindly obeys, but it has no idea who it is obeying. So the first step to obedience is knowing who to obey. Before I came to Christ, I obeyed me, my passions, my

understanding, my history, my surrounding, my friends. Those were the "cage" that shaped my obedience. And to be sure, there was lots and lots of choices there but just like with my parakeet, those choices were not freedom. They were limited to what my passions had chosen for me. I was in a cage but I didn't know it. And one of the things that made it obvious was when I finally decided to leave the cage. When my friends found out that I had become a Christian, a awful lot of them just simply dropped me. I was no longer a fun guy to be around. See, I had made a choice that this world forbids. I mean to go back to the ice cream analogy, if I had been truly free in this world, I should have been free to choose any flavor I wanted including the Christ flavor, but in fact I never really was free. Then again I was limited by my passions and by my peers to the flavors I could choose. And you know, only God can break that. And he breaks it by choosing us. Jesus told his disciples in *John 15*, he said: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.*" So first we have to know who it is we're going to obey. Two choices: The world or Christ. It is Jesus Christ who chose me for obedience.

Well, next we need to know, okay, I know who I obey. Why is it that I choose to obey him? Well, our text this morning gives us that answer. He says we obey because we are obedient children and

we are obedient children because God chose us as his own, and again we go back to Peter's own words at the introduction to this letter. He says: *Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.* So why do we obey Christ? Because we've been chosen by the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to the Son. I can't make it any planer than that. But that's the easy part. You see, we obey Christ because he chose us and empowers us. The world obeys its master because it has to. Again: *We know we are children of God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* Tell your average person on the street that he or she is under the control of the wicked one and they will laugh right in your face, and it's because our choices make us think we are free. And even though we are enslaved, just like the Jews of old, we still think that we are free.

And that leads me to our third point which is how we obey. God makes some pretty radical statements about the nature of our will, our freedom and our slavery that point to how we are to view this idea of obedience. See, when Jesus confronted the religious leaders of his day in *John 8*, he made a statement about freedom that was deeply upsetting to them. He said in *John 8:32*, he said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* The

Jews replied to him: *"We are Abraham's descendents and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"* Jesus replied, *"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* Well the Jews were absolutely flabbergasted. In fact they weren't just flabbergasted, they were outraged that Jesus would question their freedom in spite of the fact that they were already slaves on multiple levels. First of all, by their own statement they were Abraham's descendents. That meant that they had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. So on the basic, the most basic level when they said we've never been slaves of anyone, they were full of it. And secondly, here we see the Jews bragging about their connection to God and they're bragging to God. Little absurd. They didn't even know it. They were so enmeshed in their sin that they had no idea that it was controlling them. And thirdly, we are no different than them. They are us. What Jesus was saying is this principle that now governs all of life, what he is saying here is the "how to" of obedience. And it's this, whatever you give your obedience to will become your master. Let me repeat this. Whatever you give your obedience to will become your master. For good or bad, for right or wrong, for life or death, what you choose to obey is going to own you. As Bob Dylan so aptly put it: You got to serve somebody. I mean it may be the devil, it may be the Lord but you've got to serve somebody. Christians alone get to choose who they will serve. But I choose

those words very carefully 'cause there's only one group of people on this earth who can actually choose who it is they're going to obey. That's born again Christians. You see, if as Jesus says he who sins is a slave of sin, and if all of us are sinners because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and this whole world is under the control of the evil one, then it follows that only those whom God has freed from that slavery can even understand what it means when he says: *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."* Christians have freed with a "D," freed wills instead of a false notion of what a free will is. See, we're the only people who've had their wills freed from the slavery of original sin. It's only those who have been born not once but twice who have that freedom. Only born again believers in Christ have the ability to choose whom they will obey. But now this is the hard part. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where my will is brought to bear on the idea of obedience. You see, we now represent that parakeet pulled from the cage of our slavery to sin and we suddenly find ourselves in a position to choose who is now going to be my master. We can choose to go back into that cage of our fallen sin-filled past which looks like freedom only because it still has some choices that you can make or we can choose for ourselves the only master who promises real freedom, and that's Christ. You know, it was Martin Luther who put it very succinctly when he said this, he said: "Man's will is a

donkey." He said, "Man's will is a donkey and the only choice he really has is to decide who it is that's going to ride him, either the devil or God." Listen to how Paul puts this in *Romans 6:16*, he says: *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?* What God is saying here to believers, he says, you alone are truly free to choose. You get to make the choice. You get to pick your master. So how do I do that? Well, I obey Christ knowing that whom I choose to obey will indeed become my master. I mean the choice is between sin or obedience. And along with those choices come the consequences. The consequences are death or righteousness. I mean this is how it works. God chooses me, God empowers me, I choose my master. I can choose to be a slave to sin which will lead to death or I can choose to be a slave to obedience which leads to righteousness. Say, well, okay, how do you flesh this out? How does this obedience work? Well, Paul goes on to explain it in *Romans 6:17*. He says this: *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.* What Paul is saying is now that you have the freedom, you get to make the choice. And he goes on to say: *I am using an example from everyday life because of*

your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? So he asks his question in his time. I ask it in our time. I say ok, ask what benefits did you reap at that time from the things that you are now ashamed of? So ask Bill Maher or ask Tinder or Hugh Hefner or Larry Flint or Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins or drug addiction or pornography. You know what Paul says: Those things result in death! But now that you've been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

See what God is saying to believers, he says, hey, the ball is in your court. You get to decide who you obey, why you obey, and how you obey. And so we ask, how do we obey? Well again, let me put this in athletic terms. Let me give you the names of three different athletes. The three names are Archie, Peyton, and Eli. If you know who those people are, raise your hand. Okay. About 50-50, that's pretty good. Those are the Mannings. I mean Archie is the dad, he was the quarterback of the New Orleans Saints.

Peyton and Eli are his sons, they were and are quarterbacks of the Broncos and the Giants. This kind of family dynasty is extremely unusual but it's also very obvious that Peyton and Eli got their talent and their empowerment from their dad. But it's also very obvious as you follow football at all that they simply -- by being simply gifted biologically, they didn't have it made. It wasn't enough. Peyton and Eli didn't just show up at training camp and say, "Hey, by the way, my dad was an NFL quarterback." That didn't mean a thing. They had to work at it, from Pop Warner to high school to college to the pros. Here's how this applies to us. If you are a Christian, God has chosen you, God has empowered you, God has placed his Spirit within you but you have to choose to work it out. You have to choose to obey. God says in *Philippians 2:12*: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. See, those five commands that Peter gives us, they all require one particular thing. Peter says prepare your minds, be self-controlled, set your hope on grace, do not conform to the old evil desires, and be holy. Every one of those things require discipline. There's no magic involved in this at all. There's just a determination to do things God's way. Peter says be holy. You know, for some reason I don't know how we think this but I tend to think some people think that, well, that means we sit around and wait for the holy fairy to sprinkle holy*

dust on us and then we become holy. Listen to what God says in *Hebrews 12:14*. He says: *Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.* I mean consider the first three words of that sentence, "make every effort." I mean that's something that we do. You see, the fact is the secret to being obedient children is that there is no secret. It's just simple discipline. Peter says "prepare your minds." Obedience starts first and foremost with a renewed mind, with understanding who God is and who we are in relation to him and for us that means the Bible. It means reading it, it means studying it, it meaning learning what it teaches us. You can't think biblically unless you know your Bible.

Secondly, he says be self-controlled. We can't begin to renew our minds if we're not willing to access the self-control that God has already given us, and that simply means being intentional about your relationship with Jesus Christ. That means finding a small group or if you can't find one, starting one. It may mean turning off the TV and turning on any one of the thousands of other resources that are now available to help us grow as believers.

Thirdly, it says: *Set your hope on the grace to be given you when Christ is revealed.* God has already empowered us with his grace. We just have to access it. Our gifts are not that different from

the gifts that Peyton and Eli Manning have been given in that they both require discipline, work and effort to bring them out. It also requires a trust that God's already placed that grace within us. And like anything it requires discipline to be willing to start small and stick with it because folks are desperate to see Christ in you even in the little things.

And fourth it says: *As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* See, the premiere weapon of the enemy of our souls is ignorance. And Paul knew that and so he studied the enemy "*in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*" And the business end of ignorance, it's incrementalism. You see, the enemy will almost never suggest to you something that you know is outright sinful or wicked. What he will do though is suggest the very same goal incrementally. And he always takes his sweet time, suggesting that tiny little steps in the wrong direction are no big deal and they're not going to hurt anybody. I mean I've seen the pattern repeated over and over again. Skip church just once, it's no big deal. It really isn't a big deal, except the second time it becomes a little easier, then a little easier still and so it goes. From the language that we use, to the type of entertainment that we watch, to the people that we hang out with, to the evil desires we conform ourselves to, they always start out small but they always

end big. Obedience counters incrementalism the very same way, one tiny step at a time. One step to Bible study, one step to a small group, one step to prayer, one step to who we hang out with. And so simply by refusing to be ignorant, we thwart this enemy's schemes.

And finally he says *be holy in all that you do*. Well, if you haven't done any of one through four, I can tell you right now there's no magic that's going to suddenly produce holiness while you wait for it. Holiness is not something you passively wait for, it's something you actively pursue. See, we are the ones that God calls on to *"work out our salvation with fear and trembling."* We are the ones called on by God to quote *"make every effort to live holy lives"* and we can't do that unless we know who we obey. Well, that's the Lord Jesus Christ. And why we obey. That's because we are children of obedience chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to the Son. And finally how we obey. Knowing that what I choose to obey will become my master. God says look closely at obedience, look at the fruit it produces, look at its life, look at its benefits. As obedient children, choose wisely. *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for Peter and I thank you for the practicality of his words. I thank you for the call to discipline that we see in his words, that these things don't happen by magic, they happen by simply deciding we're going to do it. I pray that you would give each and every one of us the idea and the thought and the notion that we don't have to start in some enormous way but to simply incrementally start at the beginning, doing what we need to do to get right with you. Give us the grace, the peace, the power and the will to be obedient, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.