

## Self-Control, Pt 2

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Last week I started a small series on the nature of self-control, biblical self-control and I started it by giving you a long discussion about my own life, not so as to place myself somehow as the example of what perfection or self-control looks like but simply because I didn't know where else I could go that was safe. I didn't want to come up with a pretend person, usually right now his name is Fred, the fictional Fred and find out that, in fact, I was describing in lock step your life and then you walk away thinking that I was just picking on you or that perhaps it was something that I chose out of the air that was to use as an illustration that would describe you and make you wonder if maybe your wife or your husband has been talking to me privately. Self-control is one of those issues that is always a touchy issue because we all know that we lack it in some area, in some way. There is some place that we could improve upon it. The problem with us, though, is 1. we lack a lot of self-control, at least some do, I believe, and others don't understand self-control from a Christian biblical perspective. It's not a Christ-centered self-control, it is merely, if you will, a form of legalism or it's a form of just this world's concept of self-control and so in all of this I'm trying to unpack the idea and the concept and the theology of it within the Bible itself.

It is very hard for people to end well and you know what I mean if you've ever started something that you didn't finish or when you finished it, it was an embarrassment or a point of shame or perhaps you fell just short of the goal; you were so close and it was within your grasp and then you made some fateful decisions that robbed you of that which you desired. I think, in fact, some of the people over the years who have won gold medals in the Olympics only to have it stripped because it was found that they, in fact, had not run the race as it was supposed to be run, a frustration that that would bring to me, I would think, just thinking of the years of labor and preparation and then those decisions that led to that point where ultimately the prize that was within my grasp literally was taken from me would be extremely frustrating.

The point that I am trying to make in all of this and the point that I will try to say every possible way in this small series is that biblical self-control is not the same thing as just self-control in general. It's not enough for you to simply say, "Well, you just need to have self-control." To a degree that's acceptable and in certain contexts you need to do that. You need to tell your little boy who's wiggling all over the place, "Sit still and show some self-control," and you need to help train that little boy or girl on how to exercise self-control and to grow in that. You need to learn how to exercise basic self-control but the

Bible describes self-control as something that is the fruit of the Spirit, that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness and self-control. So it's something that comes from God himself and so what is the difference between a self-control that any individual can exercise and, in fact, may do in a phenomenal way. The holy men of the various religions in India have been examples of phenomenal self-control on that level, depriving themselves of things that are beyond our comprehension as a typical American. What's the difference between that self-control and a biblical, Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered self-control? I will argue for you over the next several weeks that the difference is that self-control that is biblical and Spirit-empowered is one that has eternity in its focus; that its focus is not on the now, but on the not yet; on what is to come, eternity, and all that is involved in that idea of eternity, of the coming of Jesus Christ and his appearance, of the judging of the living and the dead, of the separating out those who shall suffer the pain of hell through all eternity under his wrath and those who will be ushered into his joy and his glory and his recreation of the heavens and the earth. The fact of those who were not saved and those who are saved; those who are enemies and those who have been adopted as children of God. The concept in the Bible of eternity, that is what makes biblical self-control unique because it has a different point of focus and a point of drive that motivates and also limits how you live and why you do or don't do certain things.

I would argue, in fact, that everyone who exercises self-control does it for some goal or purpose. Good, bad or ugly, it doesn't matter. They all exercise self-control because they have a goal in mind. Again, we can go back to the athlete in mind, one who is, I remember I was telling Bruce R. about this. I remember watching back in the 70s, I think, prior to the Olympics and looking at the life and the training of man who was, I believe, one of the ski jumpers and you'll go down the slope and then you jump. And they were interviewing him and they were just going through his workout and it was just disgusting. This was a man who had a normal job and so he had to go to his job first of all, but in the morning time he would wake up at some unbelievably early time and he would go for a long run, like 10 miles and he would do this big workout prior to work, go to work all day long, and instead of coming home and turning on the tv or relaxing or reading a book, he had another workout afterward. One of them involved him duck walking for like 15-20 yards and then coming up to a large stump and then he would leap over it in a crouch and land again, and then he'd duck walk to the next one. He would just do this some amazing number of times. It was all designed to build his lower body strength. It looked miserable. If you've ever duck walked, they would make us do it in karate. I hated it. It was just one of those things. Give me knuckle push-ups any day. Make we walk like a duck and I just get in a bad mood. And this guy did it every day, rain or shine, doesn't matter, he's going to do it. He had a very careful diet that he had to take upon himself. Why? Because the man wanted to get a gold medal. He had a goal in mind and the goal in mind was, "I want gold medal," and as a result sleep is less important, comfort is less important, enjoyment in these activities is less important. I will exercise self-control over these desires of my body in an effort to attain this goal. Does that make sense?

People will do it. They will exercise self-control because they desire power and so they will exercise self-control around certain people where they don't want to, though they

might want them hang with these people and be around these people, they being known as a person of these people might say, "Well, he's not the kind of guy we want," and therefore it would diminish his opportunity for power. People who desire great wealth will deny themselves many pleasures early on in their life that they might gather for themselves and amass a great amount of wealth for later on in their life, all of that just simply being a goal. You can do it for minor things. You want to have a clean house so you'll wake up early. Goals help you have self-control and what you do is you tend to live a life that indicates what your real pleasures are. This is where it gets uncomfortable for us. Our lifestyle describes for us, paints for us, what our real goals are, what it is that we treasure. As the Scripture says, "Where our treasure is, so shall be our heart." Those things that we delight in is where we place our treasure. The same thing with regard to exercising self-control and living out our life. The things we say no to and the things that we say yes to describe for us what we delight in, what we treasure, what we enjoy.

This is all then to be the drive of the spiritual disciplines that we mentioned last week, the idea of prayer and Scripture intake and meditation, things such as these that we learned from Don Whitney that those things are not an end to themselves. Don does not tell you that you need to pray because you need to be a praying man or woman; he doesn't tell you you need to read the Bible because that's what Christians do. It is through the reading of the Scripture that you know more of God and you see yourself more rightly in relationship to God. It is through prayer that you commune with God and you begin to worship God in your words and in your mind as you bring back to him that which is true; as you lay your burdens upon him. As he says, "Cast all your cares upon me for I care for you. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." The idea is to an invitation to have a relationship and a communion with God through prayer. The goal then is not prayer in and of itself; it's not Scripture reading in and of itself. All of those are designed for a greater goal and that is to know and to see God fully.

This is where I then began to open up this whole series on self-control and the idea and I laid out a point that I couldn't finish last week so we're going to finish it this week and that is that the need for self-control is so huge because your soul eternity hangs on it. In other words, heaven and hell are in the balance. This is not a subject of a how-to sermon. This is not what you've got to do to get your act together. I don't really care about getting your act together in and of itself. It has to do with your soul, whether or not you exercises self-control, self-discipline, restraint, however you want to word it. It deals, in fact, with salvation. This is where the rub is because when I start to say that, I get people's eyes going, "Hm, what's he saying? What is he meaning by that?"

This is really just simply the doctrine of perseverance of the saints in a different perspective or a different package. The doctrine of the perseverance of saints, those of you that have never heard that, it's the idea that God shall save to the fullest those who are his. If they are truly in Jesus Christ meaning they're truly a Christian, they have truly come in faith, then God shall make certain that they shall endure all the way to the end unto fullness of salvation and that's a fairly, still a fairly simplistic explanation but that's the idea. It's not, what I am not talking about here in this series is the doctrine of losing one's salvation. One cannot lose genuine salvation and we have said that so many times

in so many ways from this pulpit that I don't want to go into that. You just simply cannot. The Scripture does not allow for that. At the same time, though, I'm not talking about the other side which is the idea of once saved always saved, something I was raised in. Well, once you're saved, you're always saved. To one degree you could say, "Well, that's true," but that's not a good way of describing it because it tends to then create within people this idea that, "Well, I asked Jesus in my heart when I was five, when I was this, when I did that. I got saved." Whatever "got saved" means and, "I'm good. Once saved, always saved, you know." I grew up in a church environment that was always saying, "It's under the blood. It's under the blood." And you'd be amazed at how much sin that you could commit that was allowed to be committed because it was under the blood. That's not the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It is a very full, mature, subtle doctrine and when people start to study it, they get themselves kind of tied up in knots because it is complex; it's not simple; it's not, just give me a Bible verse, Matt, because there's a multitude of Bible verses and it's a multifaceted, very full, complex diamond of a doctrine, if you will.

But the best way that you could approach it, I think, if you wanted to do it as simplistically as you can, is to approach it keeping two perspectives in mind. Both of those perspectives are true and necessary and they ought not to ever be separated, though they have to be made distinct. It is a lot like the idea of faith and works in the Bible. We are called to have faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ. We are called to be a people of belief and faith and it is by faith that we are saved, not of works, yet the Bible also makes it very clear that if one has faith, one also has works. Works shall never save you, faith saves you, but the kind of faith that saves you works. In fact, we'll look at it in just a moment as an illustration of what I'm getting at into all of this, but the idea is that you need to have a distinction between coming and having faith and resting in the finished work of what Jesus did on the cross alone for your salvation, that his death and his resurrection is the sole basis of your salvation, the sole basis of your acceptance to God. God will never accept you a little bit more because you tried really hard. God will be unimpressed with that. God says you will place your hope and your faith and you will rest in what Jesus did. That's it. But if that is true, you must do these things and to say, "I will not do these things but I believe this," is to deny what you believe and so much so that the Bible says, "You say that you believe, show it by your works." And we'll look at that.

So we see these, we see this distinction of these two things but we can't separate them because the moment you say it's faith without works and never shall there need to be works, you're not talking biblical. So it's uncomfortable for us because we like things nice and clean and neat. Well, in the same way, these two ideas objective perspective of our salvation and the subjective perspective of our salvation, both of those need to be kept in our mind and if we don't keep them in our mind, then we just go off into despair often. This objective idea of our salvation, of whether or not we will be saved in the end, we will end up with our Lord in heaven in eternity enjoying the glories of what God has given us, the objective side of it is God's. God knows who are his. The Bible is filled with passages, Ephesians 1:4, that before the foundations of the earth were laid, he chose us in Christ Jesus. He elected us. He set us apart in Christ Jesus, predestined to be adopted as

his children. All of this idea is that before he even made us, he had made these choices. In John 10, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep. They don't know me yet, but I know my sheep and when I call them, they will know me and hear my voice and they will follow me." Or over in John 6 where it says that, "all that the Father has given me, I shall save." That's a paraphrase but that's what he says in John 6. "All that the Father has given me, I shall save. I will lose none of them." The idea there is that there is this people that God has given to his Son to redeem and to save and those he shall make certain that he lose none. So on the objective side, God's not up there saying, "Gee, I just don't know what's going to happen to that Matt Henry." He knows who are his.

Then on the other side, though, is the subjective, more the idea of based on our sense, our feeling, our intuition; it's not as clear. We're not God. We don't know for absolute. One may believe and hope that they are the elect, that they are saved, but the way that it is evidenced is through things such as works. Go to, I should have told you to turn here, James 2. I'm sorry. James 2, right near the end of the book. I'll give you a page number if you're not certain as soon as I get to it. James 2:1. This is a passage I was just making reference to, actually in verse 14. James 2, page 178 near the back of the Bible. He says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?" then he asks this rhetorical question that assumes the answer is no. He says, "Can that faith save him?" What kind of faith is it? It's the non-working faith. It's a faith, nobody's going to argue with him on that, it's just a faith that does not work. He says that faith cannot save. Then he gives the illustration. "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Again, he is just using it as an illustration. You can sit there and say, "I am very concerned about Joe." Joe and I are very burdened. Here is a genuine need. Through no fault of his own, he is hungry, without food, and I say, "I'll pray for you," that kind of an attitude when you have the ability to actually help, he says has no value. The man walks away naked and still hungry. There is nothing good that came from that, nothing real. You give him a blessing but you give him no food? He says that is no different than one who says, "I have faith but I do no works. I do nothing." He says that's a worthless faith.

Then he goes on to build off of that. "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" And he goes on to talk about the fact that Abraham, their father, the father of all who believe, was not a man who believed and did nothing. He had a faith that acted all the way to the point of offering his only Son as a sacrifice in obedience to the Lord.

So faith and works, this is the idea. How can one say, "I believe and therefore I know I'm going to heaven," and yet not act as one who ought to be a Christian, one who has faith? Only a fool assumes he is the elect when he is actively, openly, willingly practicing sin. There should be no assurance of one's salvation, no assurance of one's sense of election. I have met many a people over my life span so far who are very big on the doctrine of

election which is fine because I am too, but it bothers me that there is this mindset that they are assured in their own minds, "I know I'm the elect." I'm like, "I don't. I don't have any card that came from heaven that says, Congratulations, you've entered into the election club." There is only one thing that drives me in this and it's not to add to their servile fear, it is that I believe that Jesus is who he says he is. And if he is who he says he is and he has done what he says he has done and I believe that, then how then should I live? And it is those things that give me the assurance, a very subjective thing, the assurance of my salvation. On the objective side, I then always go back to the Gospel promises that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved and I say, "Have I called upon his name?" I look back at the Gospel message and the Gospel message is what Christ has done, that he alone is the perfect salvation; he alone is the perfect sacrifice for sin; that on his death God laid sin upon him and he bore the weight perfectly; that on the third day he rose again destroying the power of sin which was death. And I have to ask myself, "Do I believe that?" And do you know what? I say this frequently in my life, "Do I believe this?" I don't allow myself to get into a fit of despair where I just spin around and keep trying harder and harder. I keep on asking myself, "Do I believe that? Do I believe what the Gospel is?" Then I come back and I say, "I do." Then my next question has been, "Well, how then must I live?" and I just keep going over and over and it drives me in works that are fitting one who believes.

The idea, the principle of self-control is, you must understand, an aspect, not the aspect or the only aspect but an aspect of the idea of perseverance. In other words, I'm not just talking about lightweight things, I'm talking about your soul. And if you understand biblical self-control rightly, then you'll be caring for your soul rightly. You'll become one of those Christians that becomes scary powerful in the hands of the Lord, though the world might mock you and, in fact, many Christians might shake their head at you as you exercise self-control because you find that the Gospel and the glory of the revelation of Jesus Christ to be far more desirable to you than the many things that perhaps control you right now.

So today I want to look more at this idea and I do ask you now to go to 1 Corinthians 9 to re-look at a passage that we saw last week. A little bit more idea of this idea of the need of self-control. 1 Corinthians 9, that will be on page 134 of your pew Bible, this Bible here in front of you, 134. Verse 24 and following, it is written, actually over one page, page 135, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." This idea of self-control was not something that Paul had no knowledge of, this is something that he lived. And he brings out this analogy of the athlete and he creates some parallelisms here. He's got the race and he's got the prize. The race that is being run is on an earthly level with an athlete in the Olympics and they're trying to get their wreath that they would wear and it would show them to be the victor. The prize is a wreath, it's the perishable prize. It would be made of greenery and it looked beautiful and it showed him to be a victor but eventually

it would fall apart. Paul is running a race too, but his race has got nothing to do with this world, it's got everything to do with eternity, the imperishable prize therefore. That is what is running for. That's the race that he's in for. If you were to say, "Are you running the race to win the prize?" He'd say, "Yeah." "What is it?" "Heaven. That's what I am looking for."

Now understand that the prize is what causes the self-control, the desirability of the prize. The prize for the athlete in that day was so great that they were willing, like the Olympic athletes of today, to literally suspend their desires for other things so that they might win the race. They actually would do these activities naked and the purpose of it was so that nothing would slow them down, nothing would encumber them. They sought no issue in their life that would cause them a weakness. It is very similar to Hebrews 12 where he says, "As you run the race that is set before you fixing your eyes on the author and the finisher, Jesus Christ, you need to lay aside the sin and the encumbrances." Many a time in my discipling of people, many a time in my just casual conversations with people, I will recommend to them that they ought to maybe rethink what they're doing and so often the question back is, "Well, what's wrong with it?" It's not that it's wrong, it's just an encumbrance. It just slows them down. Why carry it? Why would you go on a hike through the high Sierras carrying some lead weights in your pocket? That's just dumb. Why don't you just put them down? "Well, why? What's wrong with it?" Okay, if you want to walk through the high Sierras and you want to carry lead weights in your pocket, have fun, just don't ask me to carry them. Did that make sense? It's just exercising self-control, stripping away these things. It is a mindset that says that his prize is worth running for. Running for, so much so that I exercise self-control in everything or as Paul says, "I make my body my slave. I will not allow its desires to cause me to not desire this prize anymore."

I want to use an illustration from Piper that I thought was very good. John Piper in his book "Don't Waste Your Life," he has a chapter called "Living to prove what is more precious than life," and he talks about this idea of what's called the wartime lifestyle. He says,

"Sometimes I use the phrase 'wartime lifestyle or wartime mindset.' The phrase is helpful but also lopsided. For me, it is mainly helpful. It tells me that there is a war going on in the world between Christ and Satan, truth and falsehood, belief and unbelief. It tells me that there are weapons to be funded and used but that these weapons are not swords or guns or bombs but the Gospel and prayer and self-sacrificing love, and it tells me that the stakes of this conflict are higher than any other war in history. They are eternal and infinite, heaven or hell, eternal joy or eternal torment. I need to hear this message again and again because I drift into a peacetime mentality as certainly as rain falls down and the flames go up. I am wired by nature to love the same toys that the world loves. I start to fit in. I start to love what others love. I start to call earth home and before you know it, I'm calling luxuries needs and using my money just the way unbelievers do. I begin to forget the war. I don't think much about people perishing.

Missions and unreached peoples drop out of my mind. I stop dreaming about the triumphs of grace. I sink into a secular mindset that looks first to what man can do and not what God can do. It is a terrible sickness and I thank God for those who have forced me again and again to look toward a wartime mindset."

"I thank God for Ralph Winter, for example, who not only wrote powerfully about a wartime lifestyle but has lived it as a missionary, professor, and founder of the US Center for World Missions, and tireless advocate for the unreached peoples of the world. He gave the following vivid illustration of the difference between a wartime and a peacetime mentality about the use of our possessions.

"The Queen Mary, lying in repose in the harbor at Long Beach, California, is a fascinating museum of the past. Used both as a luxury liner in peacetime and a troop transport during the Second World War, its present status as a museum the length of three football fields affords a stunning contrast between the lifestyles appropriate in peace and war. On one side of a partition you see the dining room reconstructed to depict the peacetime table setting that was appropriate to the wealthy patrons of high culture for whom a dazzling array of knives and forks and spoons held no mysteries. On the other side of the partition the evidences of wartime austerities are in sharp contrast. One metal tray with indentations replaces fifteen plates and saucers. Bunks, not just double but eight tiers high, explain why the peace-time complement of 3000 gave way to 15,000 people on board in wartime. How repugnant to the peacetime masters this transformation must have been! To do it took a national emergency, of course. The survival of a nation depended on it. The essence of the Great Commission today is that the survival of many millions of people depends on its fulfillment.

He goes on to say the, "Given the vulnerability of my heart to the seduction of the peacetime mind-set, which is pushed into my mind every day by media and entertainment, I need these images and these reminders. We are at war, whether the stocks are falling or climbing, whether the terrorists are hitting or hiding, whether we are healthy or sick. Both pleasure and pain are laced with poison, ready to kill us with the diseases of pride or despair. The repeated biblical warning to 'be alert' fits the wartime image. And I need this warning every day."

That is what I'm talking about, serious stuff. Do you have in your life and is it evidenced that you have a wartime or a peacetime perspective? When you look at the prize, the prize like the Queen Mary, imagine what a person must have seen who had gone on the Queen Mary in its height of luxury and perhaps somehow they were able to come on board when it was a troop carrier and they saw it completely transformed and now ugly but capable of carrying 15,000 men into battle for the sake of peace and for freedom. For



them, they might look at it if they have the wrong mindset, they might look at that and say, "This is horrible." But if they have the right mindset, they will look at it and say, "This is good. This is good." Is it beautiful? It's not beautiful in the sense of this but it's beautiful in the sense of this because it is achieving the goal. The goal is freedom.

When I ask you or I challenge you or the Bible, more importantly, or God through the power of the Spirit begins to convict you of certain things that have to be killed and put away in your life, ways that you spend or live or breathe or talk or recreate, whatever it might be, has to be done away with and you know it, it will either be something of beauty or something that ultimately is repugnant to you because you have no desire toward it because the prize is the wrong prize. I'm trying to let you see over these sermons that the prize is heaven; the prize is God; the prize is salvation for all eternity. It is not something to be taken lightly.

In this passage then he talks then about becoming disqualified and questions were raised this week about what that means because I said it meant that he would not ultimately find himself in heaven, that having labored so hard, ultimately he finds himself to be disqualified and there are other views on this and I'm going to spend just a couple of minutes talking about those views before we move on. Some see that disqualification as a disqualification to the ministry of the apostle, that if he does all of this no longer would he be allowed to be an apostle. Others would say it would be that he was disqualified from ministry and preaching of the word of God. Others would say, no, it's a loss of reward; that God will remove certain rewards in eternity from him. But that's not the sense here. The context of this is that he's running a race and when you're running the race, why are you running the race? Do you run a race just because you like running races? No, you run a race to win and even if you know you're not going to win, you're running the race to better your time or something. You have a goal and the goal is that you do something. We're using a racing mentality here. What is the goal of a race ultimately? Aside from winning, what do you have to get to? The finish line. And what happens when I ran track, I ran the 220, now it's just called the 200 meter but back then it was in yards and I ran the 220 and you had to stay in your lane and you weren't allowed to cross and there were times where I remember racing and I never did it thankfully, but I was on the 880 relay team and our third guy rounding a corner slightly stepped one foot partially out of his lane and the race ended for us. We were disqualified. We didn't win. We didn't get to the finish line even. Whether we won or anything else, we were done. We were disqualified. We had not followed the rules. That is the imagery there.

But the word is very strong, it's not just simply being disqualified, "Oops, you missed. You broke a rule." It literally means to fail the test. It means something that is worthless. The idea is that it is something that you think is one thing, you think it's this, now hear it because it will make more sense, you think it's this but it's not, it's this. And when you test it, you see it's this. There are ways that you can test gold to see if it's really gold and how pure it is. There are all kinds of tests for various objects and things that you can do so that you can know if it really is what they say it is. Many a forgery has been found to be a forgery only under electron microscopes and things such as that. I believe it was jade back in the ancient world that they would have certain jade figurines that if it was

without cracks or these certain blemishes, it was a very valuable object and they would rub wax, a certain kind of wax, into the little crevices and cracks to obscure them. One of the things that the wise trader and buyer would do would be heat it up to see if in fact the jade remained jade or some wax leaked out because the moment they saw the wax they knew that it was an inferior product. It failed the test. That's what he is saying. He says, "I am running and I am bringing my body under self-control, making it my slave, because I don't want to fail the test. I don't want to lose. I don't want to find out that I've been running a race all this time and in fact I haven't been running according to the rules."

Go over to 1 Peter 1 and you'll see all of this laid out very clearly, I hope. 1 Peter 1, that would be on page 180. In verse 13, he says, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Now, it looks like there are three things that he is telling you to do here. It looks like he's saying: prepare your minds, keep sober, and fix your hope, right? But in fact there's only one thing he's commanding you to do, it is only one command in here and that is to fix your hope. The other two are not commands, they are how you fix your hope. They're what are called in grammar as participles. In fact, a better translation would be, "Preparing your minds and keeping sober." The "ing" makes it a participle. And you say, "Okay, so what?" Here's the point: Peter here is writing and he says, "I want you to learn to fix your hope." Fix your hope. In fact, it is the duty of every Christian in their life to cultivate a type of hope that is persevering and confident and disciplined. I'm going to say that again: it is the duty of every person here who says, "I am a Christian," to cultivate a type of hope that is persevering and confident and disciplined.

What is this hope to be focused on? Remember the prize. Notice that he gives us the prize. It's not just some, "Hey, have hope." It's fix your hope completely, totally, only on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, when Jesus comes is what you're supposed to be looking for. That's all. My hope is not on my 401(k) plan, my hope is not upon my health, my hope is not upon my relationships, my family, my friends, my country, my politics. None of those things. They are not my hope. They cannot be. He says, "Fix your hope totally completely and only on one thing: the coming of Jesus Christ," because if you have that as your hope, then everything else will follow. Your life will follow and you will begin to live out a life that is proper and at this, the book of 1 Peter because Peter is writing to people; he describes who are aliens and strangers. They don't live here. They don't belong in this world. That's you and I. If you are a follower of Jesus, this world is going away and we don't belong here. That's why it's so hard at times to live here. But we don't know how then we ought to live if we are strangers and aliens, if we have fixed our hope fully on the coming of Jesus Christ and that's what we hope in, how then do we live and the rest of the book describes it.

Now, how we do it is important. The word "therefore" in verse 13 points us backward. Let me just read verses 2 down to 12 and give you a sense of what he says that then says, because of this, fix your hope on Jesus. He says, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying," or setting apart, "work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

Blessed," or praise, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again," to be made alive, "to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," it was the Father who causes us, "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Guess what that grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ in verse 13. Part of that is this inheritance that is waiting for us in heaven that will never fade away. Then he goes on in verse 5, "who," now he's talking about the people themselves, "who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this," not in your life here but in those promises, "you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." This is everything I've been saying. All of these promises, all of these ideas that this is what God has done, this is what he has accomplished, this is what's waiting for us. We continue to rejoice in that, not even though over here we're imprisoned, over here we're losing jobs, we're losing promotions and friends and this and that. All of that is happening over here because we love Jesus and that causes us distress and we might go to our bedroom at times and cry and we might shake with sorrow or even frustration that those who once were close to us no longer want us. We're distressed but in those things, those promises of what is to come, in this we greatly rejoice. We keep the prize in front of us.

Therefore, he says, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit." This is the idea. These two participles tell you how to fix your hope. You say, "Well, okay, I want to fix my hope. How do I fix my hope?" Do you know what it is? It's self-control. He just says it different ways but it's just self-control. Listen, prepare your minds, another way of describing it would be girding your minds. That's the way my old translation used it. It was this, they wore robes back then and when they were going to go hike, they were going to go work in the fields, or they were going to go battle, they would take their robe and they'd lift it up and they'd tie it around their waists and they had a girdle or a belt that they would put around and they would tie it so it did not encumber them. They got it up out of the way because it was time to work or fight. Your life may depend upon it. You can't be having these robes tripping you up, and so they would pull it up out of the way and what he is saying here is the preparing of your mind or the girding of your mind is taking this mind that's filled with distractions, is that not you? Be honest, is that not you? Does not America throw every possible distraction your way? He says taking your mind, preparing it by girding it up, tying it up, taking all of those distractions and say, "I will not tolerate this. I will block that. I will turn off this so that I might fight the fight of true faith. That I might win the prize."

Can you imagine a football player running down field with a football for the game winning touchdown and then all of a sudden halfway there and he's got it, he stops because somebody beeps him on his cellphone in his back pocket. The fans would kill

him and you say that wouldn't happen. The way people so instinctively feel they have to answer their phone no matter where they're at, one day it's going to. One day it's going to happen. You're going to call me a prophet when it does. It's absurd and yet how often do we sit there and allow every distraction under the sun? For some reason, people believe their cellphone, and I'm not here to rant on cellphones, just allow me to rant. They believe their cellphone has to be on. Why? For what purpose right now? Is there some emergency that you're waiting, some phone call from some person that's so critically important that you must have your cellphone on right now? Anything that might be buzzing or a distraction making you wonder, "Oh, oh, it vibrated. That means I've got a text message. I wonder who texted me right now?" What do you care? I mean, really? People who say, "Well, I've got to have the tv on when I study." Really? That really let's you focus in on the text before you by having that tv on?

He says take your mind and gird it up. You want to have self-control, you want to be prepared for eternity, then there is going to have to come a point where you start to take all of those loose ends that is your life and you start tucking them under the belt and cinching them up so that they're not there dangling. Some people have such a phenomenal desire to do something but they do not, they do not do the things necessary to achieve them. They allow all the dangling ends. You want to lose weight, but you'll allow food that you ought not to have in your house in your house. Well, then you're just asking to fail. That's a loose end. You don't want to read fiction for the next year, you want to read only non-fiction biographies and the word of God, whatever. You'd say, "I need to get rid of all this silly fiction that's so light." Fine, then why do you still allow it in your house? Why don't you put it in boxes, seal it and put it up in the attic? Just make it go away. Tie it down. "Oh, well, you know, I think I can..." And sure enough, within a few months you're reading what you didn't want to read. It's not wrong to read these things, I'm just simply saying there are so many things that we do in our life that we intend to achieve this but we will not gird our minds and that is what's going to cause many a person on that day to find themselves separated with those into hell, finding out that in fact they've been disqualified for they had no interest in making their bodies their slave.

He goes on to say keeping sober minded. My idea of a mindset of seriousness. You've heard me say this many times in the past, the meaning of the word "amusement." A book written called "Amusing Yourselves To Death," by Neil Postman. "Amusement" just simply means this: muse means to think, m-e-n-t at the end means to be in the state of thinking. But the "a" in front of it and it means "the absence or the lack of thinking." It is being in the state of not thinking, that's what amusement is. So when you go to the amusement park, you go there so you don't think. When you turn on the tv, you turn it on so you don't think. When you go and play x-box, you do it so you don't think. And this nation and sadly the church is amusing themselves truly to death. Their mind is so distracted, so frivolous, so casual that they cannot think about those things which are serious for very long before they have to go back into the casual because it's uncomfortable, it's distracting to them.

Go over to 1 Peter 4:7 just to see this. He says there, it's just one page for most of you if you're in 1 Peter, on page 182 he says in 1 Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." You need to keep your frivolity in perspective. The end is near. You need to get a lot more serious. In 1 Peter 5:8, he picks it up again. In verse 8 he says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Lack of seriousness, in other words, allows Satan to eat you alive.

Again, I can say this and I do this, I have disciplined countless people over my life. I had to face these kinds of rebukes from men who disciplined me to whatever degree. I was never really disciplined but I had a few men that worked into my life nonetheless, and I remember them chewing me out and I didn't like it. I walked away all miffed and angry. I was, "Who is he to be....?" Every excuse under the sun. But as a man who does his life of disciplining, the one thing that brings so much friction between me and those who say they want to be disciplined is an unwillingness to become serious. They just won't do it. I can give them things to read, papers to write, tasks to do and they throw themselves into it for a moment until the next shiny object wanders past their eyes and then they're distracted. "Oo, something pretty. Oo, a new ringtone." You guys are laughing and it's okay to laugh, I want to cry. I want to scream at you. Do you not see hell? Does it not mean anything to you, your very soul? Is it that small of an object for you?

My friend Bruce lost a dear friend of his and several of you here know of him, Joe Z. He's now with the Lord. He was supposed to live a little bit longer the way I was told, that he was coming off the chemo and that he would be around was the word I heard. He'd be around for another few months, what was it a week? The end is near, beloved. Be sober. It's time to gird your minds. It's not a joke and it's no humorous and I don't care if you ever get rich because you exercise self-control. I'd rather you be poor toward this world and rich towards God because you have sold your soul out to pursuing that which is eternal and you don't care one whit about that which will burn away. I'm serious about this series. This church will never go anywhere, you shall never go anywhere until as a group and as individuals we tighten things down and we stop making the massive number of excuses that come up with ultimately the same answer, "I did not do it. I didn't do it." Every excuse under the sun but the same result, "I didn't get it done. It's not done. It's not finished." So countless neighbors go unmet. Countless sins are unrepented of because you need to watch the next show on tv. You have to catch up on what's on Hulu. You've got to read that blog.

Just go over one more page if you're in 1 Peter 5, you should be in 2 Peter by then, page 182. 2 Peter 1:5, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge," what? "Self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love." Then he says, "For," this reason, "if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." He says, "I want you to be fruitful. I want you to be useful. I don't want you to be useless and unfruitful." Those are the kinds of things John 15 says that

Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. My Father is the vinedresser and he'll just take those branches that do not bear fruit, cut them off, burn them up." He said, "I want you to be fruitful. I want you to be useful but these things are necessary."

The key here is in verse 5. He says, "for this very reason also, applying," the word is, "diligence." I think the ESV, English Standard Version, says "virtue," right? Neither of those is a good one. Well, actually, "applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence." I'm sorry, that's the one I meant, moral excellence. I think it's virtue for the ESV. It's a hard word to translate. Some of you have heard this before so you're already with me but it's a word that describes military acts of valor or bravery and such. This moral excellence would be used of the man who won the Congressional Medal of Honor because through no thought of his own safety, for the sake of his fellow soldiers, he charged the pillbox on the island of Iwo Jima taking heavy fire, suffering many wounds, and continued the task so that he could take out the pillbox, such rescuing these individual soldiers and therefore awarded the highest Medal of Valor our nation can ever give. It was this mindset that the guy has because whenever you listen to a real hero who talks about what they did, they weren't thinking, they were doing what they were supposed to do. They were doing their duty. Somebody had to go do it and it was just something in the person that said, "I'm the one. I have to. There's no one else." And off they go. Sometimes they die. Sometimes they live. It doesn't matter, they're doing their duty. That's the moral excellence he's talking about. That's the idea that he wants you to have.

Now, I'm saying this because further down in the list you'll notice self-control shows up. You say, "Well, I've really got to get self-control in my life." You're not going to get anything unless you have moral excellence or virtue or better yet, courage. Moral courage, this decision to say, "This is right." I said it last week, I'll say it again: it is not hard to know what you ought to do in life usually, most of you know what you're supposed to do, the only really question is do you have the courage to go do it? Do you have the courage to go home and tell you wife, things change? "Starting today, we're going to begin to change." Do you have the courage as a husband and wife to go home to your children and say to them, "In our household, things are going to be different"? Into your workforce, do you have the courage to go and begin to act and live and work and breathe differently? You don't have to be obnoxious, just different. The courage to do what is right. The courage to honor the Lord and to keep the prize fixed before you like Paul. You don't want to wait until everything is in place because Satan will make sure it never happens. This is why I'm going to preach a sermon on the sin of procrastination and I won't tell you exactly when it is because I don't want you to not show up for it. I want you to hear, but I'll sneak it in.

There's a guy who was a former pastor who wrote about his favorite verse, it's Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." He says that's his life verse. He likes to play poker. I don't. I would die and lose everything, but he enjoys it. He says he's not good but he likes the game. But he pointed this out, he said poker players don't deal the cards nor do they decide the cards, they just simply play the hand that was given them and they do the best with it that they can. And when I read that,

I thought, "That's exactly what I'm trying to tell some people in this room to do." You're saying, "Well, I'm going to wait until I've got this or I'm going to wait until I've got that." No, do you know what? The cards have been dealt to you already. You've got them. Now you can improve upon them. You can discard a couple and hope some better ones come your way but if you're waiting to become godly, if you're waiting to become obedient to the Scriptures, if you're even waiting to get your act together to come to Jesus Christ and become a Christian, you're never going to make it. The cards are there. The cards are there, do something with it with all your might. You say, "Well, I'm not very intelligent." So what? What does that matter? "Well, I'm not very strong." So what? God has given you strength that he has, he has given you the infirmities that you have and the weaknesses. He's given you everything that you have. He has dealt you those cards. Go do to the fullest extent what you can.

Let me give you a quick example of that. I had a friend who worked with me at Grace Community Church while we were at seminary and you have to understand that especially then my mind memorized very, very easily. It was no hard task for it. And he ended up taking Greek with me and so we were going to learn Greek together and he was like, "Hey, I'm going to beat you." I'm like, "Alright, you do that." And me, I'm like I'm just too tired to even care. I'm just going to go and take Greek. So we went to Greek class together, we studied in the same class, we studied separately, though, outside. He would work so hard. He was not a good memorizer and he would just work so hard at his Greek and I would work so little because so much of Greek was memory and so I would usually wait. And remember my sermon from last week so you don't say, "Ha, you were not being faithful." I would just wait because I had other things to do until usually about 15 minutes before the class, memorize my 25 words, go in, take my quiz and then take the class and I would just do that each day because of my schedule. He would stay up all night long memorizing the same 25 words and he would come into me just before class, "Let me test myself." "Okay, Ron." And he'd do it and we'd go into class. When the class was all finished and we were all done with the course, we got our grades. We both got A's. He got a 98, I got a 96. He was from Brooklyn and he didn't ask you something, he axed you something and he was walking in with his red purplish face just jubilant. He's walking around the accounting department shouting out that he beat Matt Henry. I'm just like, "Man, set your heights higher, dude." But he was enjoying himself. He was just like, "Ah-ha, ah-ha, oh yeah. In your face. In your face. In your face." Do you know what? I was happy for him. I was happy for him. He put forth all the energy he had to earn that. I put forth only minimal. I should have gotten 100. I really should have. I mean, if I had just simply spent a half an hour instead of 15 minutes, I should have gotten 100, but I knew I had more than enough to get my A and so I expended that much while he had to labor with all of his might to achieve the same grade. I'm still proud of Ron. It's got very little to do with what you have, it's what you do with what you have. That moral courage to say, "I don't know if I'm strong enough but I'm going to try."

So he says that if you have the moral courage, having added to your faith these things, he says they build off of each other. Each one is necessary for the next thing to take place. In other words, until you have this moral courage to do the right thing, you will never learn, you will never know. You just won't. And that knowledge will never result in self-control

and your self-control will never produce perseverance or endurance which in turn will produce godliness. None of these will occur because you simply lack the courage to begin and then to stay in the race and to stick with it until it's done. All of that takes us then down to its end, verse 10, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and His choosing you, His election of you, for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." Why? "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." Do you see that? Your soul. Back to your soul again for him. He doesn't want you just to be filled with knowledge or have self-control or be godly or have brotherly kindness or love or the other things that he listed. That's not his goal. His goal is heaven.

You say, "I am the elect." Do you evidence these things? Peter would just simply say, "Well, let's look at your life. Are you a man of this and this and this and this? Are you a woman of these things?" If you're not, I think you need to take a step back and re-look at what your faith is and if it's producing the necessary fruit. It's not a joke. You say, "I am the elect." He would say, "Prove it. Prove it. Show it." All of it begins with courage but as it does it will produce things and one of them is that self-control that some of you yearn for. It's not going to happen because you talk about it. It's not going to be happening because you stick it on Facebook and say, "Gee, I really want self-control." You can blog about it. You can even pray about it. It's not going to happen. I've had people in my office, "I'm just, you know, I've just been really praying the Lord will give me self-control." I'm like, "Why?" And they're like, "What?" I say, "Why are you praying about that?" "Because." "Because why?" "Because I want it." "But why are you praying about it?" "Because." And we go around.

Just look up a couple of verses above verse 5, verse 3, "seeing that His divine power has, has already, granted to us," how much? "Everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and grace." I'd say, "Do you know you're asking for something that you already have? What do you think he's going to give you, extra?" You say, "That comes across snotty." I'm not trying to be snotty but it just shows the lack of understanding of the nature of spiritual growth. You're praying for what God has given. He has granted you everything if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ. He has given you everything pertaining to life and godliness, the only question is do you have the backbone to stand up and use it because once you start there and you decide, "It's my duty. It's my delight. The love of God is far more desirable than anything this world could give me therefore I will say no to these things and I'll say yes to these things and if my family disowns me, it doesn't matter." And we begin to walk, we begin to move forward.

True self-discipline comes from seeing the glory of God and the infinite worth of Jesus Christ and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit and when we see that God truly is our delight, truly, then we will willingly and joyfully set aside pursuits that offer nothing in the end and instead we will willingly and joyfully restrain ourselves and commit ourselves to God's glory for it will become our passion.