

Building Your Christian Life
Self-Control, Endurance, Godliness

2 Peter 1:6 (05/25/14)

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2 Peter 1:5-6 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, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness,

Building is exciting. I worked for a contractor for about a year in 1990. We built homes in the Seymour, Indiana area. As in any building venture, you do things in the right order, following the blueprints, laying the foundation, then framing, getting the roof on, running electrical and plumbing, dry walling, blowing in insulation, painting the walls, installing cabinets, appliances, carpeting, even landscaping in some cases. Sometimes we made mistakes and had to start over. "Whatever it takes" was my boss's mantra. We applied all diligence and supplied one thing after another to get the job done. It was exciting.

That's exactly what Peter is telling us in our passage. If you are a believer, you are building your Christian life, and that's exciting. You start with the foundation of personal faith in Christ alone, which God sovereignly lays in your heart. Any other foundation will not do. When the storms and winds and rains slam against a spiritual house not built on Christ, it will go down in a great fall. What is your life resting on?

Beginning with that one and only foundation of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, God says you diligently supply in your faith seven qualities, capped off with agape love in verse seven. These qualities are absolutely necessary to live a useful and fruitful life for God. Last week we looked at the first two: moral excellence and knowledge. You need virtue or moral excellence right there at the beginning. Knowledge without moral excellence makes fine hypocrites. We've all known people with heads as big as beach balls but bodies the size of a mouse.

Being committed to moral excellence, we need knowledge. Build a growing supply of God's Word into your life. Apply all diligence, go after it, learn as much as you can of your Bible, of theology, of church history, of the biographies of godly men and women. Ignorance is not bliss in the Christian life. Ignorant Christians are choice meat for cults and religious hucksters. Proverbs 2 says we should let out all the stops to dig into the Word, to cry out for wisdom, discernment, knowledge. Seek truth like you'd seek after a pound of gold hidden in your back yard!

Now, with these next three qualities we could just spend this whole sermon confessing our sins. Self-control, endurance, and godliness. These three will give us all black eyes and bloody noses. Who has all of these we need? If you feel you've got all these in the bag, you need to go back to moral excellence and talk about being honest. Ask your kids and your spouse how your self-control is going. That includes your reactions, your tongue, your handling pressures from your in-laws, out-laws, and other sundry trouble-makers in your life.

We don't need a lot of "the Greek word means" here. We know what the words mean. What we've got to do is diligently, aggressively, progressively build them into our lives by the grace and power of God. J. C. Ryle wrote his book *Holiness* to refute the unbiblical teaching that all we have to do is "let go and let God." Even today there's a huge controversy over this issue of sanctification. One high profile pastor is teaching that since we're sinners, we can't keep these commands, Christ kept them for us, and we just

rest in that. But that's not what our passage teaches. We're in a war, and we don't float along down the lazy river here. Our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil, and these forces will call forth every ounce of diligence you can muster in the power of the Holy Spirit. Your business is to fight. The Spirit's business is to feed your fight with His power so you can win daily skirmishes.

Let's look at these three briefly and then expand a bit:

Self-control means saying no to our sinful, selfish desires and saying yes to God.

Endurance means staying true to God regardless of the pressures and troubles we meet.

Godliness means aiming your life at pleasing God every day.

THE GRIP OF SELF-CONTROL

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 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.

Self-control is the last of the fruit of the Spirit, so this isn't just human effort. The Spirit empowers believers for self-control. Many unsaved people practice self-control. If you're going to excel in anything - sports, music, a profession - you're going to have to practice self-control. But for a believer, it means taking your selfish self by the scruff of the neck and telling him, "Look, buster, you're not in control here, Christ is. He has called me to deny myself and follow Him, and that's exactly what we're going to do!" Rather than follow our self-serving feelings, we follow Christ and His truth.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 compares your Christian life to an athlete's exercise of self-control – their diet, their time, their practice – all to receive a perishable wreath. Paul says we believers need to learn from that. We know where we're running, we're not shadow boxing – we're boxing with our three enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil. And in verse 27 he says take yourself in hand and give yourself a black eye – Wham! That's what the Greek word means. Refuse to let your body detract you from living for Christ. Beat it into submission. Make it your slave, to obey you as you obey Christ. Does that sound like just "let go and let God?"

How do we practice self-control? First, be aware that when you got saved, the Holy Spirit moved onto the throne of your heart, but He didn't eradicate sin or your self-serving flesh. It's like a poisonous spider or serpent that still sneaks around just waiting for opportunities to lure you, to betray you, to seduce you into pleasing yourself rather than God.

So be aware that you have all the potential of ugly, deadly sin in your house, your life. Set up a security system to sound an alarm when it spies any movement of sin. Self-control is mostly being quick to smash and crush and deny the first movements of that ugly flesh. Let's apply this to your tongue. Who needs self-control over your tongue? Proverbs is full of this, but Ephesians 4:29 is perfect. The very moment you realize you are about to open your mouth and let a pack of mad wasps come flying out, stop yourself. Immediately. Get a grip on that slippery muscle and determine to obey God by saying something gracious, edifying, encouraging, or, based on Proverbs, don't say anything at all! The first moment you are tempted to please yourself by sharing some juicy gossip, remember you belong to Christ. He died for your sins, you are in Him, and you want to please Him, so strangle that thought before it flies out your mouth! Deal with it in your heart. Remember, Jesus said, "Out of the heart the mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45)

There's a radical element in godly self-control. Ed Welch in his article on *Addictions, a Banquet in the Grave*, says self-control is not for the timid. You must nurture exuberance for Christ and demand of yourself a hatred of sin. Whatever aids and abets your sinning, kill it, get rid of it, replace it. You don't war successfully against your flesh with sponge balls. There are times when you've got to rip out an eye, or chop off a hand or foot to keep yourself from following your own selfish pleasures. I didn't say that; Jesus did! (Matthew 5:28-30) The more you love Christ, the more you'll hate sin. You cannot love Christ and coddle selfishness in your heart at the same time.

So, aggressively build self-control into your Christian life. The battle for self-control is fought primarily in our minds, in our hearts. It's a battle with our passions, thoughts, desires, and lust to please ourselves. Even our anger is a lust to please ourselves. Someone crossed me, I'm not getting what I want, and I'm not happy about it. I deserve to be treated better than this and I'm justified in unloading my anger on that person! Self-control extends to all of life: how we use our time, our money, our eating, our sexual desires, and much more. What's out of control in your life? What sinful habit has you addicted and you need the freedom of self-control to conquer it? You can. God promises it.

THE HOPE OF ENDURANCE

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Self-control deals with bringing your inner selfish desires and pleasures under God's rule. Endurance means hanging in there in the face of the severest difficulties, sufferings, opposition, when everything inside of you is screaming to quit, go back, run away!

Winston Churchill famously charged the young fellows at Harrow School where he attended as a boy, "Never give in – never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

This is exactly what we see in Hebrews 12:1-2. God says run with endurance, hanging in there regardless of how tough it gets, keeping your eye on Jesus, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of God. When Jesus was heading to that cross, everything in Him was screaming go back. Matthew 26:37 says He was grieved and distressed. Mark 14:33 says He was very distressed and troubled. And Luke 22:42-44 says He was in agony, in anguish, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done!" That's self-control and endurance. And why? For the joy set before Him. That's hope.

Hope is the key to endurance. When you face troubles, suffering, diseases, persecution, what do we remember? God is sovereign and has allowed this trouble to come. It's not an accident. How we rejoice in that! Second, God has a definite purpose in this trouble, and mainly it's to help us grow to become more like Christ. And third, God assures you there's an end to this. 1 Peter 1:6-7 says it's for a little while, but it will usher us into His praise and glory and honor! That was Job! Beat up from top to bottom and all around, he held the truth, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him, and when He has purified me I will come for as gold." (Job 13:15) Miriam is a doctor in Sudan, arrested and sentenced to hang for refusing to renounce Christianity. That's endurance. Pray for her. Esther went in before the king, taking her life in her hands for the sake of her people the Jews, saying, "If I perish, I perish." That's endurance.

Build endurance into your Christian life. Stick with it. Don't quit. Never give in. And when you do, confess and get back in the race. Paul said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4:7) That's endurance all the way to the finish line.

THE DEVOTION OF GODLINESS

1 Timothy 4:7-8 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

This is that beautiful word that describes the character of men and women who love Jesus Christ and aim their lives every day toward pleasing Him, loving Him, and praising Him from the heart. There's an external, fake form of godliness, but it stinks – 2 Timothy 3:5, "having a form of godliness, but denying its power." This passage is different. Here we're talking about a God-centered, God-loving and worshiping heart. It's a strong, deep, controlling, practical, daily awareness of God in everything you do. It's aiming your life every day at pleasing Him. Paul expressed his commitment to godliness in 2 Corinthians 5:9 like this: "I make it my daily goal and ambition – to be pleasing to God."

1 Timothy 4:7 assures us that building godliness into your life is not easy either. God expects you to discipline yourself for godliness. Godliness doesn't happen automatically.

The godly man or woman is a believer who sincerely fears God, loves God, and trusts God. You see this in Joseph so well. He lived in the very real sense of God's presence. He feared and loved God enough to refuse to sin against God when many men would have melted like cotton candy. How can I sin against God and do this evil in His sight? And he saw God's providence for good and it affected how he responded to his betrayer brothers. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. A godly believer knows God has his good and his back.

SO WHAT?

Self-control, endurance, and godliness. What beautiful qualities in a human being! Every believer longs to excel in these. Every parent wants their sons and daughters to be growing in these. Ah, to have leaders in our country to excel in these qualities. How many celebrities, Marilyn Monroe, Jimi Hendrix, Whitney Houston, and so many more, crash and burn because they lose control of their lives! Monitor your speech, your reactions, your use of time, money, food – do they demonstrate self-control? How many people have quit the race? How much godlessness there is all around us. Don't quit the race. Don't let godlessness rule you. Evaluate your heart and life right now and identify areas in which you need God's help to grow and change in self-control, endurance, and godliness. And remember, we aren't here just for ourselves; we need to disciple and counsel others in these beautiful qualities that go into building a Christian life.