

Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Self-Discipline, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

90-130

We have the opportunity, this morning, to continue our study of the anatomy of the church and what a joy it is to bring to you another in this series of spiritual attitudes that the Bible tells us are essential for healthy church life. Of course, that comes down to us as individuals, doesn't it? We are the church. These attitudes need to exist in our own lives.

For those of you who are visiting with us. Many months ago, now, as you can tell because this is part 20 or 21 or whatever, we started talking about the anatomy of the church. And we took the body metaphor, the New Testament talks about the church as a body, that's one metaphor that is used in the New Testament to describe the nature of the church. It's like a body connected to a head in the sense that its life is connected to its head, Jesus Christ. And there are some wonderful ways in which the Scripture sort of explains that body analogy.

And we've taken a little liberty to expand and extend the analogy a little in this series on the anatomy of the church. And have been talking about not only the skeleton, the rigid form, the sort of bottom line, non-negotiable things that give the church its rigidity and its structure and its shape, but we've begun to talk about the internal systems. Just as a body has internal organs that carries its life, so the church has internal attitudes, things that are true in the hearts of its people, spiritual attitudes, spiritual motivations that carry the life of the church. And when the church exhibits those spiritual attitudes, it becomes strong and effective. And where they are absent, it becomes weak and ineffective.

And as we have gone along in these spiritual attitudes, we've talked about things like faith and love and humility and unity and contentment and thanks and joy and forgiveness. We talked last week about courage, or boldness, or fortitude, or strength as a necessary attitude for the church. And it's kind of in that same vein that I want to take you to another essential spiritual attitude that must exist in the life of believers if the church is to be strong, and let's call it spiritual discipline, spiritual discipline, self-discipline, spiritually being able to discipline your own life...very, very essential to spiritual growth.

People who have great ability to concentrate, great ability to focus, great ability to define and stay consistently within their priorities tend to be very successful in this world. And self-discipline is an essential component in that, whether you're talking about some kind of academic achievement, some kind of musical achievement or athletic achievement or whatever it is, some achievement in the realm of business or the arts or science generally comes to people who are very focused and who understand how to order their priorities. In a word, they are disciplined people.

And self-discipline is a very, very useful thing in life. As a kid growing up I'm very thankful for parents who were very disciplined, both a mother and a father who had very disciplined lives and who set

very clear lines for me. I certainly wanted to live outside those lines as much as possible, but found it exceedingly painful to do so. And I was not rewarded by my efforts to live outside those lines and learned that I was much happier if I stayed inside. My parents established patterns of life for me and I was disciplined to stay within those lines. And there their loving rigidity, their loving concern about me learning to be a disciplined person and my parents saying to me so many times, "You lack self-control," I can remember that speech so many times, not only from parents but from teachers, and learning self-control by the faithful, loving discipline of my parents is a very important part of contributing to the kind of person that I am today where self-discipline plays such an important role in my life.

I received the same thing from professors, particularly in seminary and from coaches who...who know how to abuse you sufficiently to get you to do exactly what they want you to do, and nothing else. All of those things were important in teaching me self-discipline. And just from a worldly standpoint, self-discipline makes a great contribution to your success and your effectiveness.

Very often when I have occasion to talk to young people, I like to talk to them about the matter of self-discipline, and harnessing your life, and how important that is. And when I do that I give them a little list of things to work on. If you want to be a self-disciplined person, and you as parents can begin to inculcate these things into the life of your own children, if in fact they're part of your own life, and let me just kind of tell you how in the human realm you can kind of pull some things together in the area of self-discipline.

One is to begin with small things...to begin with small things. Learn to discipline yourself in the little things of life because it is the little things of life that make for the big successes. You must begin with the small things. Every little issue of life has to carry weight and importance, not because, listen carefully to this, not because in itself it's important, but your integrity, your credibility, your word is important even in little things. And learning to train yourself in those little things is absolutely essential.

Another principle, and I'm not elucidating these but just kind of suggesting them as food for thought, another one is clean your environment. What do I mean by that? Get rid of all that stuff, clean your desk, your room, your house, your garage, there's a thought. Just become discontent with a mess in general. Get yourself to the place where orderliness matters. Some people need a lot of help in this area. But learn how to get rid of the excess, learn how to trim down, learn how to keep your environment clean and clear so that you can function without a myriad of distractions and so that you've made decisions and selections about what matters, what doesn't, what's important, what isn't.

Make a schedule, that's a third one. I'm not necessarily suggesting that you have a daytimer book and you write down every breath you're going to take through the day, or that you put up some big calendar in your house. But I am saying make a schedule and learn to conform to it, whether it's an absolute hard and fast schedule which appeals to the engineer type sort of accountant type folks, or whether it's a little more fluid, but nonetheless you can anticipate things and you can establish time frames in which they need to be done and learn to train yourself to keep that schedule.

Another principle of developing self-discipline is to wean yourself off of being entertained so that entertainment becomes for you really something that's arbitrary...you can take it or leave it. Get yourself to the place where you if you have excess time do things that are productive rather than sit and be entertained. Entertainment, makes a very, very small contribution to your well being and to

your success. Wean yourself off of being entertained. Another alternative, how about this, read or take a walk with somebody, or have a conversation, or plant flowers or something.

Another principle that I learned long ago and is very important to me is to be on time...be on time. That means you can order your little universe so you can get where you need to get when you're supposed to be there, clothed and in your right mind. Learn to be on time. Even in small things, even in insignificant things because it says an awful lot about how your life is ordered and how you've preplanned all the stops between here and where you need to be at that moment. It's very important, and it says volumes to the people are supposed to meet you there about how important it is for you to be with them.

Keep your word, that's another one, even in the littlest things...keep your word. If you say you're going to do it, do it and do it when you're going to do it and do it the way you said you'd do it because your word is so important. Don't make promises you don't keep. Make commitments and see them through. That calls for discipline. That calls for discipline before you make the commitment because you have to look and evaluate the time, your talent and the capability that you have circumstantially to pull it off. Once you've made your commitment, keep your word in the littlest thing. It might be the smallest thing, learn to keep your word and you'll begin to keep your word in big things.

Another thing that has really helped me through the years is to do the hardest task first. Always do the hardest task first. Whatever is most difficult, that's what you want to begin with. And save the very easiest thing for last. Most people work on the reverse. And when they run out of time, and they've run out of energy, then they have an excuse not to do what they should have done first because it was most difficult and probably most important.

Another principle of self-discipline is to finish what you start...finish what you start. Some people's lives are just a long litany of unfinished stuff. If you start it, finish it. That is a tremendously important principle of self-discipline, finish what you start.

Here's another one. Practice self-denial...practice self-denial just for the sake of self-denial. Just say no so you can say to yourself, "Self, you can say no when you want to." I mean, it might be something you would like to do, might be something that's fine to do, just say no so you can remind yourself you're still in charge and you're not completely at the whim of your impulse. I've suggested even that next time you have the opportunity to eat a triple decker, super-big banana split, topped with chocolate and all of that, you might just say no, just so you can say to your stomach, "See, I'm still in charge." It's good to practice self-denial.

And then another thing that I think is really good for self-discipline is to volunteer, is to just volunteer for tasks. That means you've got to leave a little space in your life, you've got to have your life ordered well enough to say, "Hey, I'd like to try that, I'd like to step into that, I want to help over there." And you subject yourself to something that really isn't a part of your own agenda, but it's necessary and it calls for some order in your life.

Well, we could elucidate all of those and expand on them and give you illustrations, but I'm really just kind of handing those over to you as simple little principles that you can work on in your own personal life and with your children, to help them to develop self-discipline. But that's purely the human side of self-discipline, and frankly, folks, there is a human side to it because we are human.

The compelling question is...hey, who cares? Why do I need to be self-disciplined? Why do I want to be self-disciplined? And the answer to that question takes you to the Word of God. Now we have a biblical issue at stake. And for that, let's go to 1 Peter chapter 1...1 Peter chapter 1.

There are series of little commands kind of tucked around in the New Testament that address this issue of self-discipline in a number of ways. We could talk about 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body to bring it into subjection," certainly that's a self-discipline verse, 1 Corinthians 9:27. And there are a lot of other things we could go to in terms of self-discipline. Paul saying, "I always press toward the goal of Christ's likeness," that gives him focus. And Hebrews chapter 12, you lay aside the weights and you run the race with your eyes fixed on the author and finisher of your faith, and there's some self-discipline inherent in that.

But there are a number of little texts tucked in the New Testament in places that directly hit on this issue. And 1 Peter 1 and verse 13 is one of them. And as we'll see in a moment, the surrounding material sort of elucidates it. But verse 13 says this, "Therefore gird your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit." Just stop at that point, those are just little staccato brief commands but they are addressed at the issue of self-discipline, spiritual self-discipline. Gird your minds for action.

Remember last week we were talking about Ephesians 6:14, gird up your loins with truth, remember that? We talked about a Roman soldier when he went into battle wearing this kind of loose-fitting tunic, would put on a sash and he would take the four corners of the tunic and tuck them up into the sash. And he would pull all the loose ends in and get everything tight and tied down because he was going into battle. And that's really where spiritual victory begins. It begins with a commitment that says I'm going to get the loose ends of my life all pulled in here and I'm going to go into this battle ready.

Well that's the same imagery here. When someone would go on a walk or a mountain hike or a long trip or whatever, they would do the same thing. They would pull up the skirts of their tunic and they would tuck them into their belt and they would tie things down and off they would go for action. And that's precisely the idea of self-discipline. Gird up your mind. What it means is pull in all the loose ends in your thinking. Pull in all the loose ends in your thinking. It's a very important concept.

And he follows it up by saying, "Keep sober." Literally in the Greek, "Keeping sober." Keeping sober defines how you pull all the loose ends in. What does keeping sober mean? Well it's not talking about alcoholism. It's not talking about being drunk. What it's talking about here is being clear-minded and understanding priorities. Sober mindedness in the Bible has to do with understanding priorities. Thinking about things you ought to think about, that's what prioritization is.

A disciplined mind is a mind that avoids the intoxicating elements and allurements of the world. We're talking about somebody whose mind is clear, whose priorities are fixed, who has a spiritual steadfastness, who exercises self-control in their thinking, who has balanced priorities. You could even call it moral decisiveness because there are fixed principles in the mind. That's why sound doctrine is so important, you have to have fixed principles in the mind in order to establish priorities of behavior, mental alertness. It's the opposite of sort of whimsically careening through life in reckless self-indulgence at the response of your emotions to every option. It's being able to clear out the clutter from life's entanglements and sort out what really matters in your mind.

In Romans chapter 13 and verse 13, Paul said, "Let us behave properly as in the day," not in carousing and drunkenness and sexual promiscuity and sensuality and strife and jealousy. And there's the picture of the typical person just careening through life responding to every lust and impulse and desire with no sense of really what is going on and no prioritization and no standards and no clarity of thought. He says put on the Lord Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Well it's like the mind of Christ, think like He thinks.

In 1 Thessalonians again in chapter 5 he says in verse 6, "Let us not sleep as others do but let us be alert and sober." Don't just be going around in a stupor, don't be going around in a fog, a victim of everything going on around you, but on the other hand be alert and understand your priorities. Verse 8 he says, "Since we are of the day," that means we belong to the Lord in the light rather than in the darkness, "let us be sober." Let us know our priorities.

And then in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 8, a final verse that expresses similar commands. First Peter 5:8, "Be of sober spirit, or sober mind, be on the alert." And then he goes on with that passage we commented on last week about the devil going about like a roaring lion. Get your priorities right. Be sober in your mind. Be watchful. Again, I say, it simply means to pull in all the loose ends in your thinking. And, beloved, that is why sound doctrine is so important because it's the foundation of sound doctrine, which we talked about in the skeleton, that allows you to have some starting point for the establishment of your priorities. And then you can become a spiritually self-disciplined person.

Now, what are those internal priorities that are going to make us self-disciplined? I know it's important to do the human things that we kind of shared with you at the beginning, but there has to be some driving motivation to get your life in order and I want to give you what that driving motivation is.

As you think about your priorities, what would be the foundational priorities based upon sound doctrine that you need to establish in your life that are going to make you a disciplined person, so that you just don't careen through life, run amuck, wander off into sin over here and sin over here, so that you'll have the discipline it takes, the control it takes by the Holy Spirit to be an effective Christian? What are those principles that make for a self-disciplined believer?

Number one principle is to remember who owns you. You see, your behavior is a direct result of how you think and how you think is a direct result of two things...it's a direct result of one, information that you have in your mind; and two, it's a direct result of the level of commitment you have to that information. In other words, you will behave in accord to what you know and what you believe about what you know. And since as Christians you know the Word of God, you have the foundation for your belief. And since you are committed seriously to the authority of the Word of God, you believe the Word of God. Your action then is a product of what you know to be true and what you believe. And the first thing that's essential for you in this matter of self-discipline is to believe this, you don't own you.

Now that goes against the grain of everything in our culture because everything in this modern-day society is self-centered. And every message coming through, through all of the media possible and through all the educational system is that every individual is the king of his own little world, and you have a right to be whoever you are, don't let anybody tell you who you have to be, you're who you are and you be who you are and you set your goal and determine your own levels of satisfaction and pursue your own dreams and don't let anybody get in your way and pick your own life style, etc., etc.,

etc. And don't let anybody crowd you. This is equal rights, this is personal freedoms. That's how it is in our society.

And along comes the Bible and says to us...you are not in charge of you. In fact, not only are you not in charge of you, not only are you not free, you are a slave. You are a bondsman and a servant of God in Christ. And that's where it has to start.

Would you look at 1 Peter then in the chapter which is our text for this morning. First Peter chapter 1 verse 14, "As obedient children." Now stop right there. Oh boy. Not only are we slaves and servants, we're also...what?...children. And what is required of children? Obedience. We not only have a relationship to God as slaves and servants to a master, but as children to a father, an authoritative relationship, I might add. "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior. Be like your Father because it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy. And if you address as Father the one who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth."

If you are God's child and you do call God your Father, then you ought to live in the fear of your holy Father, right? Who has authority in your life. You are not your own, you are bought with a price. And the price is pretty astonishing, verse 18, "Knowing that you were not redeemed, or bought, with perishable things like silver or gold, from your futile way of life inherited from your fathers, you were purchased with precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

Now here are two very strong statements in this one passage about who's in charge of us. One, we are children of a Father who has complete authority over us. And secondly, we are slaves of a Master who bought us at immense cost...the cost being the blood of Jesus Christ. And this whole matter of self-discipline starts when I realize who owns me. I am not my own, I have been bought. I have been purchased.

This is such a tremendous, tremendous principle. First Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body."

In Acts chapter 20 verse 28, the Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian pastors that they were purchased with blood by God through Christ. You remember in Galatians 3:13 it says that He ransomed us, or He redeemed us by becoming a curse for us. The price was His shed blood. The price was His sacrifice on the cross. The price was His becoming a curse and being alienated from God, as you know, when He died on the cross. We have been purchased with precious blood. This is where self-discipline starts.

I'm convinced that until you understand that you don't own you, that somebody else has complete mastery and right over your life, you will not have the motivation to be a self-disciplined person. I am God's man. I belong to Him. And you are God's man and God's woman and you belong to Him and to no one else, least of all yourself. You are not your own. That is so very important. And the Lord paid such an infinite price to purchase us because He wanted the pleasure of having us with Him for eternity in His presence. Our obedience to His lordship, our submission to His fatherhood is not

grievous because it brings about blessing in time and eternal reward in the life to come. We have been purchased at such a high cost. And you will begin to seek a holy life when you begin to understand the price that Jesus Christ paid for you.

We reiterate that again and again at the Lord's table. We go through passages in the Bible all the time to talk about the sacrifice of Christ. And we understand that and the more we understand that and the more wondrous and more marvelous it becomes, and the more magnanimous we perceive the grace of God to be, and the greater God's grace toward us is to be understood, the more likely it is to have an impact on how we view ourselves.

I think one of the things that compelled the Apostle Paul was the fact that he knew that he was such a rotten and wretched sinner. Called himself the chief of sinners. He was out, you know, persecuting Christ, as it were, persecuting Christians, throwing them in prison and even executing them. Going through all of that, he was such a wicked man from the standpoint of God's perspective. And when he was saved by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus in an act of sovereign supernatural power, it was so overwhelming to him that he never ever ever got over the fact of his salvation. And it was that very fact alone that I think was at the root of his tremendous dedication, that there was such a price paid for such a rotten, unworthy, wretched person. And when you begin to understand what God has gone through to purchase you to make you His servant and to purchase you and adopt you and make you His son and that He is in charge of you and you understand the fullness of the richness of that reality, that's going to have an impact on the way you order your life.

Secondly, and this is a very important principle. If you're going to begin to cultivate self-discipline from the inside and want to discipline yourself and to train yourself in that direction, you must remember the covenant of salvation...you must remember the covenant of salvation. It's been a long time since I had mentioned this incredible theme to you, but I want to do it because I think it is so important.

You need to look back to the covenant of your salvation. Do you remember that when you were saved it wasn't just a one-sided thing? Do you remember that when you were saved and you came to Christ and you were turning from your sin and you were asking the Lord to forgive you and you were begging for forgiveness and for cleansing and salvation and wanted to be delivered from hell into heaven, and from darkness into light, and you came with a certain level of desperation, and you came in your simple faith and you said, "Yes, God, I receive the gift of salvation, I accept Jesus Christ into my life as Lord and Savior," do you remember at that time that you also confessed Jesus as your Lord? You remember that inherent in that you were saying I give You my life?

In other words, there was a promise on God's part to forgive you and to pour out grace upon grace and to bring you to glory. There was a promise on the sinner's part as well, a promise of obedience...a promise that said I'm going to obey You, I'm going to follow You. I confess You as my Lord and my Master. That was there, too. That was in that...that transaction of saving faith. You see, saving faith recognizes sin and therefore saving faith encompasses repentance. And saving faith recognizes the lordship of Christ and therefore saving faith encompasses submission. And so you came with a heart of submission. The question is, whether or not you are still obedient.

I don't think people who come to Christ fully understand the implications of their confession. I don't think they fully understand what that submission means, what that obedience is going to entail because they don't fully understand the Scripture and they don't fully understand the Christian life

with all of its challenges. But nonetheless there was a covenant at salvation in which you committed yourself to follow Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to look at this in 1 Peter chapter 1, at the very beginning of the chapter, verses 1 and 2. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens," and all of us who are believers are aliens in this world. These were scattered believers throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, that all being around the northeastern area of the Mediterranean Sea. And so he's writing to these scattered believers who are everywhere. And he identifies them in a most interesting way. First of all, in verse 1 he identifies them this way, "Who are chosen." First of all, he mentions their election and then in verse 2, "It's according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

So based upon God's predetermined knowledge, predetermination to have a relationship, He chose certain people for salvation. That's very clear. They are chosen according to God's foreknowledge. Some people think that God's foreknowledge means that God knows something before it happens, though He has no influence on its happening. That's not what that word means. God has every influence on what happens, first of all, and secondly, foreknowledge means to predetermine a relationship.

For example, the word "knowledge," you have to be very careful how you understand the word knowledge in the Bible. When in Amos 3:2 God said, "Israel only have I known," He didn't mean they were the only people in the world He knew anything about. He meant that He had an intimate relationship with them. When it says "Cain knew his wife and she bore a child," that's a very intimate relationship that results in childbirth. When it says that Joseph was upset because Mary was pregnant, and he had never known her, it's talking about that same intimate relationship. When Jesus said My sheep hear My voice and I know them, He didn't mean that I know about them, He meant I have an intimate relationship.

God predetermined, that is the word fore, an intimate relationship, the word knowledge, with certain people on the a basis of which He then chose them for salvation. So, that's what that refers to. So salvation really starts in the purposes of God in election.

But notice how it progresses. "You are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit," that's referring to salvation, okay? I think that most people might think that the word "sanctification" has to do with what happens after salvation. No, it has to do with what starts at salvation. Sanctification includes your salvation. Being sanctified means to be set apart, and you were set apart from sin at the moment of salvation with continuing implications. But sanctification encompasses your justification, your conversion, your regeneration. Sanctification began when you were set apart from sin to God. And so he says you were elect, that's in eternity past, before the world began. In time you were set apart from sin by the sanctifying work of the Spirit which goes on then until glorification.

And then the third aspect of this Christian miracle, this salvation, is, "That you may obey Jesus Christ." Now this is a very important statement. When you were chosen, you were chosen to be saved. When you were saved, you were saved to be obedient. Okay? That's why several times Paul refers to the obedience to the truth, and Peter does as well. Down in verse 22 of this same chapter you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls.

When you came to salvation, there was an act of obedience. The Bible says, "Repent and believe," and you obeyed that command. The Father said, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him," and you obeyed that command. Salvation is an act of obedience. That's why it is called the obedience of faith by Paul in Romans chapter 1. So that's where obedience begins, with salvation and it continues. Ephesians 2:10, "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." So once you're saved, the good works flow. "Faith without works is...what?...it's dead." If there aren't any of those good works, if there's no obedience, there's no true saving faith. Jesus said in John 8, "If you continue in My Word, then you're My real disciple." "The one who really loves Me...Jesus said...keeps My commandments."

So it is an essential component in salvation that there be obedience. When you come to Christ you come because you were chosen before the foundation of the world, because you were sanctified and set apart from sin in the saving work of the Holy Spirit, and at that time you made a commitment and a pledge to obey the Lord and you were given the Holy Spirit and the grace to fulfill that pledge. So obedience is an important essential in salvation.

Now notice the next statement and that's the one I want to focus on. "And be sprinkled with His blood." At first glance you might say to yourself..."Well that must refer to the cross, that must refer to salvation, and in this order it's in the wrong place." You have election, then you have salvation, and then you have obedience, how come sprinkled with blood comes after that? It seems like it should come after election before sanctification, but it doesn't because it's not talking about the sprinkling of blood with a direct focus on the saving aspect of the death of Christ. Okay? That's not the specific aspect here. In fact, no passage that deals with salvation, no passage that deals with the death of Christ ever talks about the blood being splattered, literally.

So where did Peter get this? Where did it come from? Well clearly he got it because of his Old Testament knowledge, having been raised as a Jew who knew the Old Testament. And there's a place in the Old Testament where it is found, turn to it in Exodus chapter 24...Exodus chapter 24. This is a very important portion of Scripture and it is the only possible place that Peter could have been alluding to.

Remember now, he says "in order that you might be obedient," and then he talks about the sprinkling of blood. And so the question is...what does this obedience have to do with blood sprinkling? Well, here it is in Exodus 24. Moses comes before the people, verse 2, and he's just been up in Mount Sinai and he's gotten the Law of God. God has given him not only the decalogue or the Ten Commandments, but God has given him all the laws that are written down in the Pentateuch, and there were many of them, all the ordinances and all the laws of God. So in verse 3 Moses stands before the people and he recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances. So he comes before the people and he says, "All right, let me introduce you to the Mosaic Covenant. Let me introduce you to the Mosaic promise from God. Here it is," and he recites all these things.

At the end of all of that there comes this, "Surely if you obey you will be blessed, if you disobey...what?...you'll be cursed." Okay? That's the covenant. God promises to bless your obedience and to punish your disobedience, after having given all that. "All the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.'" Boy, I like that, don't you? I like their spirit. Did they? No, not hardly. At that moment they unanimously made the pledge. We'll obey it all. Probably very well intentioned.

Verse 4 says, "Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord." He had recited them to the people which says a little bit about his great memory. Maybe he was aided by the Holy Spirit in that. And then he sat down to write them so that we would have them throughout human history in the Pentateuch. He wrote them down and then after doing all of that probably most of the night, he got up in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. This altar, of course, was an altar to God where a sacrifice would be made. And he sent young men of the sons of Israel and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. So they do their normal sacrifices, normal offerings to God.

"And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, bowls," and there must have been a lot of blood, multiple offerings, multiple bulls. "Took half of the blood, put it in basins, the other half of the blood he splattered on the altar." These animals were sacrificed, their blood was collected and he took half the blood and splashed it all over the altar. It must have been an absolutely bloody mess. And that's the way all the altars of the Old Testament economy were, they were bloody mess. And as I told you before, the priests were elbow deep, or shoulder deep in blood. They were bathed in blood from head to toe. It was a very, very, very bloody, bloody exercise to be a priest. And so he bloodied up the altar with half of the blood and that represented the sealing of God's part of the covenant.

Covenants in ancient times were sealed in blood. You can see that clear back when God made a covenant with Abraham it was sealed in blood. That was the traditional way to do it and it was the way to affirm the covenant. And so the altar was splattered and that was God saying, "I'll keep My covenant. I'll keep My part, I seal it in blood."

And then Moses took the book of the covenant, verse 7, which he had written and read it in the hearing of the people. So this is the second time they heard it and now they hear it read. And they said again, and here's their affirmation, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient." And I like their attitude. And they affirm it again. So Moses took the blood...now you've got half the blood and it's in these bowls, and they're flat like saucers and he splattered it on the people, just takes it and washes the people with it and just keeps doing it until all this blood is gone. And he said, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." God made a promise, My promise is you obey My law, bless you...you disobey it I'll punish you. And the blood was splattered to seal God's part of the promise. The people made a promise. The people said, "We will do it, we will do it," and the blood was splashed all over them to seal their part of the promise.

That is a picture that Peter borrows...now you can go back to 1 Peter...Peter borrows that picture and is saying in a sense that when you came to Christ as His chosen, and you were saved and sanctified, set apart from sin by the Holy Spirit, and your sins were forgiven and you became a child of God, you affirmed at that time obedience to Jesus Christ and as it were symbolically you were splattered with His blood to seal your part of the promise.

Sometimes I think that we assume that the Mosaic Covenant was a one-sided covenant, it wasn't. And I'm sure many people assume that the New Covenant of salvation is sort of a one-sided thing where God promises everything and we promise nothing, but it's not. When you come to Christ you are saying something, you are pledging something. You're saying I confess Jesus as...what?...Lord, and you are offering yourself as His servant. You're confessing God as Father and asking to be made His child and in either case, in both cases, you become a subject to an authoritative Father and a sovereign Lord. You've committed yourself to obedience. That's the obedience of the faith.

That's the obedience of the truth that Peter talks about in verse 22.

And, beloved, the point I'm making here is if you want to be a self-disciplined person you must go back and remember the pledge that you made at the very beginning and be a person with integrity, be a person who keeps his word, have the integrity to keep the promise you made when you came to Christ. We were all so eager when we came to Christ to get the forgiveness, right? We were so desperate in our sin we wanted the forgiveness, we wanted heaven, we wanted to avoid hell, we wanted hope and grace and mercy and love and joy and blessing. And it seemed an easy thing to say, "Yes, I'll commit my life to Christ. Yes, I'll obey gladly." And as time goes on we forget the pledge we made and we begin to forfeit our integrity and we become enamored with sin and fail to keep the covenant with the Lord who, by the way, never violates His covenant with us, right? Never. And I might add that somewhere in the New Covenant operation there is still the principle that if you obey Me I'll bless you, and if you don't I'll chasten you. And God will keep His bargain perfectly. Self-discipline starts when you understand who owns you and you have enough integrity to be true to the pledge you made to Christ.

I'll give you a third one for this morning and then we'll end. And this is also a very important spiritual principle. You must recognize all sin as a violation of a relationship...you recognize all sin as the violation of a relationship. When we sin we're not just breaking a creed, we're not just breaking a code, we're not just sinning against the church or the leadership or an institution or a denomination, when we sin we are sinning against a person. Back to verse 14, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts." Verse 17, "If you address as Father the One who is the judge, conduct yourselves in fear." If you're God's child, act like it. Don't violate that relationship. I mean, that's at the very heart of Christian experience. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Christ is inextricably linked to His own people so that if we sin we join Christ, as it were, to that sin. First Corinthians says if you join yourself to a harlot, you join Christ to the harlot, you sin against Him in frightening ways...frightening ways. Sin has implications in all kinds of directions but sin is primarily against God. It is the violation of a relationship.

Boy, that is so important to teach. That is so important to understand. Even when you're raising your children it's important that your children understand because when they're young you're the authority. You're the one, if there is one they fear, it's you, hopefully. If there's one they love and revere and honor and respect and fear, it's you as a parent when they're young. And they need to have a healthy and wholesome fear of violating that relationship. I can understand a father who says to his son who is living in rebellion and disobedience and living a sinful life with no respect or honor for his parents, I can understand a father saying, "I loved you, I cared for you, I fed you, I clothed you, I supported you, I nurtured you, I treated you with kindness and affection, I loved you, I taught you, I protected you, is it too much to ask that you would respect and honor and obey me?" That's essentially...that's essentially what shatters the heart of a father. It's not that his son broke a rule, it's that his son disdained a relationship, right? That his son minimized the relationship and counted it as a small thing to have a meaningful loving relationship with his beloved father. That's what crushes the parent's heart. It's not the violation of a code, it's the violation of a relationship. Your children need to learn how important that relationship is.

We were talking, Patricia and I were talking the other day, we have talks even about the past in the raising of our children as we look back over the years and try to assess how faithfully and how wonderfully God worked in the life of our family so that we could encourage others. And we were talking about the fact that our children grew up with a fear of their parents. I believe it was balanced

with love. It was a loving respect and fear. And Patricia told me, she said, "Well, that's really true." She said, "I was having a conversation with one of the children the other day and I said...and, of course, they're now grown, but I said...now when years ago when you were in a certain situation and we knew that you were with some people that, you know, didn't honor the Lord," and so forth and so on, "did you ever do what they did?" And this, one of our children, said, "You know, I...I'm really hurt that would even ask that. No, I would never do that." Well, why, what restrained you from doing that? Well, apparently the conversation went like this, "Well I'd like to say it was my fear of God, but in fact it was my fear of you. I feared...I feared doing anything that would disappoint you or hurt you and so I wouldn't think of doing that." And eventually that transferred to God, but that is so important as a restraint.

I understand that. I grew up in a family like that. I...I couldn't bear to think that I would do something to bring dishonor to my father or discredit or shame or to cheapen his love for me or not to return it to my mother. I mean, it would be a crushing thing for me to experience disaffection from my beloved parents. And I feared their authority with a healthy fear. So I understand that when you talk about that in terms of a relationship to God it's really...it's really expanded but it's the same kind of thing. I don't want to violate my relationship with Him.

Let me give you an illustration of this from Philippians 2. I don't want to tell Him I love Him out of one side of my mouth and violate Him out of the other and depreciate Him by my indifference or lack of respect or dishonor. Philippians 2, this is...this is kind of lost in here but it struck me this way and I think maybe you'll see it for the first time. Paul has got some exhortations to make and they're pretty strong...pretty strong exhortations. One of them is in verse 2, "Be of the same mind," another one, "Maintain the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose," he's really calling for unity, get together he says, stop the sin of factions, stop the sin of separations. And then in verse 3, "Stop being selfish, stop being conceited." Verse 4, "Stop looking at your own things." He's really...he's really giving them some very strong commands. Verse 14, "Stop grumbling, stop disputing." They were arguing, grumbling, complaining, proud, conceited, selfish. I mean, it was a typical church, I guess, in some ways, all the battles were there.

But notice how he begins the chapter before he gets into these commands. "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, then do this..." What are you saying, Paul? Here's what he's saying. Has Christ meant anything to you? Has the Holy Spirit meant anything to you? Has Christ brought you encouragement, consolation, help and counsel? Has He brought you the comfort of His love, the gentle cheering care and tenderness, the forgiveness, the grace, the mercy of His deep affection? Does the fellowship of the Holy Spirit which He has provided for you mean anything? Does the partnership you enjoy with His Spirit sharing in regeneration and sanctification and security and prayer and spiritual gifts and teaching and enabling mean anything? And what about affection and compassion? What about tender mercies, is one translation? Does it mean anything? Does it mean anything that Christ has encouraged you and helped you and counseled you and cheered you and cared for you and been tender toward you and forgiving and gracious and merciful and loving and provided His Holy Spirit and shown you affection and compassion? Does it mean anything? Or can you just turn your back on that with utter indifference?

See, the point here is all these commands flow out of calling them to remember their relationship with Christ. It's right there at the heart of everything in terms of how we approach sin to recognize that sin is a violation of a relationship. And it puts that relationship in jeopardy as to its joy and its fulfillment.

When my children disobey and spurn my love and violate it and rebel, I don't cease to be their father but the relationship is terribly, terribly wounded. You have to see sin as that which devastates your relationship.

There was David in Psalm 51 and David...David had committed adultery with Bathsheba who was the wife of a man named Uriah, just took her and even got her pregnant. And then wanting to get Uriah out of the way, made sure he got Uriah in a compromised situation out on the battlefield and was responsible for his murder. David sinned against Uriah. He sinned against Bathsheba. He sinned against the nation Israel. He sinned against his own children who seeing that kind of pattern of example lived dissolute lives themselves, one of them even leading a coup against his own father to try to dethrone him, Absalom. David sinned in lots of different directions but this is what he says in Psalm 51 when he confesses his sin, he says, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." And his perspective was right. The rest pales in comparison to sinning against God. All sin must be viewed as a violation of a relationship. That's what it really is.

As in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul is talking immorality, sexual sin, lustful passion, and he says don't do it...don't do it, don't commit those sins. And if you reject this you're not rejecting man...verse 8...but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. Now why does he say that? The God who has been so good as to give you the best possible gift which is Holy Spirit, what more could God give you than the Holy Spirit to take up residence in your life, to seal you for eternal glory, to sanctify you? I mean, the Holy Spirit is the greatest gift He gives. The Holy Spirit is the one who regenerates us, who makes us new, who gives us the promise of eternal life and maintains that. The Holy Spirit is the strength of our continued perseverance. The Holy Spirit is the source of all of our learning and understanding of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the source of our hope and all of that and he's simply saying if you reject this and go out and commit sexual immorality, you're basically saying to God...I don't care what You do for me, I'll do what I want. And you are violating a relationship with one who has given you the very best that heaven has to offer. See sin for what it is, beloved, it is a violation of a relationship.

Now these are important elements in beginning to pull the loose ends of your thinking together to live a self-disciplined life. Well, oh we have some great ones for tonight, hope you'll come back. Let's pray.

Father, thank You again for the reminder of the importance, the urgency of living disciplined lives. And we do want to begin with the little things in life and start to pull in all the loose ends and nail down the things that are flapping. And, Lord, we want to do it for the right reasons, namely that it honors and glorifies you. From the heart, help us to remember who owns us and who bought us and at what great and immense price, incalculable. We want to look back at the promise we made when we came as stumbling sinners and were so eager to be saved and pledged our submission. Make us people of integrity. And we also, Lord, we also want to recognize that all sin is primarily an attitude that belittles a relationship, the most wonderful relationship imaginable between sinners and you, a holy God.

Father, start us on this path of spiritual self-discipline. Help us to establish these priorities, to remember that You own us, You bought us, to remember our promise of obedience and to consider how our sins offend you and may these act as motivations for our discipline that we might gird up our minds for that spiritual action that will bring you glory and keep our priorities right. Thank You again for this wonderful time this morning, in Your Son's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).