Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Self-Discipline, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-131

As we began this morning, we're continuing tonight, to talk about the spiritual attitude of self-discipline...self-discipline. Let's go back to 1 Peter chapter 1 and very, very briefly review what we said this morning. In 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 13 Peter writes, "Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit." And I noted for you this morning that there are a number of very similar commands throughout the New Testament and they're all calls for spiritual discipline, self-discipline. We are to pull in the loose ends of our lives.

As we have been studying, for you that are guests with us, we've been over a number of months now looking at the anatomy of the church, how a church functions. And we're looking at the internal systems in the body of Christ, as it were, the very things that carry the life of the church the way the organs in the body carry the life of the body. And those things that carry the life of the church are certain spiritual attitudes. And we've looked at a number of spiritual attitudes that are essential for the health of the church. And this morning we began to look at another in our list, namely that of self-discipline, pull in all the loose ends in your life and establishing priorities and then living according to those priorities. That's what that term "keep sober" means, sober not in the sense of drunkenness but in the sense of becoming intoxicated by all the allurements around you that pull you away from what is most essential and most important.

We could sum it up by saying we're talking here about having clarity of mind, spiritual steadfastness, balanced priorities, self-control, moral decisiveness, mental alertness rather than a kind of a whimsical reckless meandering through life or careening through life bouncing off of all kinds of emotional impulses and falling victim to a myriad of temptations. It's absolutely essential as Christians that we maintain an inner self-discipline.

Now what are the components of that self-discipline? We already addressed three of them this morning, I'll just mention them again. If you desire to be a self-disciplined person, a spiritually disciplined person, there are some very important attitudes that you must maintain. One is to remember who owns you. That is to say you're not really in charge of your life so you can't follow your own impulses, you can't follow your own dreams and desires and wishes. All that you are and all that do, the direction of your life must come into submission to the purposes of God which are unfolded in the Word of God and by the leading of the Spirit of God. So you must remember that you are not your own, as Paul put it to the Corinthians, for you have been bought with a price. You must bring your life into harmony with the one who owns you who is your Father and you are an obedient

child; who is your Lord and Master and you must be an obedient servant.

Secondly, self-discipline comes when you look back to the covenant of your salvation...when you look back to the covenant of your salvation. That is to say when you remember that at the point of your salvation you made a promise to submit to the Lord. You made a pledge at that time to be obedient to Christ. You confessed Him as Lord...and Lord means that He is above all. In fact, that is exactly what Philippians 2 says, God has given Him a name which is above every name. And what is that name? What's the name above every name? Lord. That's a supreme name and at that name every knee must bow.

It's essential then as believers to remember that we made a covenant of obedience when we confessed Jesus as Lord. We were saved unto obedience which God had before ordained that we should walk...and obedience characterized by good works...and obedience to God's Word. That pledge was inherent in salvation. God at the time you came to Him for salvation promised you forgiveness and eternal life and all the grace necessary to fulfill His will, and the Holy Spirit, and you pledged obedience. And you need to go back and remember that and have the integrity to be faithful to your original promise...quite unlike Israel, you will remember. They said, "All this will we do." Unanimously when they heard the Law of God spoken to them, and when they heard it read to them, they had the same response, we will obey all of this. And they preceded immediately to disobey it, and to disobey it flagrantly and persistently until finally they were under the judgment of God, which judgment still exists today. You probably don't think about it as much in terms of modern times as you would in biblical times. You read the Bible, you can see how God judged Israel. But Israel even to this day is still experiencing the judgment of God because of a failure to fulfill a promise to obedience. And as a believer you should mark it out that God will keep His promise to you to chasten you if you are not obedient to Him.

So essential to self-discipline is to remember who owns you and that you're not in charge of your own life and to remember the covenant of salvation which was a covenant of obedience and keep that covenant. Thirdly, and I think this is essential if you're going to be a self-disciplined person, and that is that you recognize all sin as a violation of a relationship. And we spent some lengthy time this morning talking about that so I won't go over it all tonight. But it's a very, very important matter for us to recognize that sin is primarily a violation of our relationship to God. It is a violation of the intimacy that which we share with a loving Lord and a gracious Savior.

When you understand sin that way, it takes it to another level. You are not simply violating God's law, you're violating your relationship to Him. You're trading on His love. You're abusing His kindness, His mercy, His compassion and His grace. He who paid the infinite price of the death of His own Son for you, who did that in order that He might come into personal and intimate fellowship with you is violated greatly by your sin. That violation not only wounds the Lord but wounds you. And you remember David prayed, "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation." He didn't lose his salvation when

he sinned, but he certainly lost the joy of fellowship.

Now I want to take you to a fourth principle in this matter of self-control, spiritual self-discipline that is very, very important and a lot could be said about it and should be and I'm not going to...I'm not going to string this out, I'm just going to give it to you as one of the points in this series of points tonight, but it could stand alone and perhaps should in your own thinking, and maybe it's a good subject for you to pursue on your own. But suffice it tonight to sum it up and say this, if you're going to be self-disciplined, you have to learn to control your imagination... you have to learn to control your imagination.

Now Peter alludes to this issue in verse 14 of 1 Peter 1 when he says, "Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance." Before you were a believer you really were subject to the whimsy of your own lusts. You had no real ability to control your heart, your mind, and your desires, no ability to control your imagination.

Now imagination is a good word because I think we understand basically in our society what that English word means. Unfortunately most of the modern translations of the Bible replaced the word "imagination" with some other words and so we lose the value of a biblical understanding of this matter of imagination. Very little is said about it today but it is absolutely crucial. Let's begin to understand our imagination by going all the way back to Genesis chapter 6... Genesis chapter 6. And here in verse 5 we read this, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth." This, of course, after the fall of man, wickedness escalates to massive proportions and the stench of that wickedness rises, as it were, to the very throne of God. And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth. And then this statement, "And that every...and the Hebrew is...imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." As I say, more modern translations have opted out for different ways to express that word, but I like the translation of the King James, the word imagination.

When God looked down at man He saw that his imagination was evil continually. Over in the eighth chapter of Genesis we find a second reference to this, in verse 21, this having to do with Noah building an altar and making a sacrifice. And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man for thee...and here's the same word again...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Again God diagnosis man as having an evil imagination.

Now the Bible talks about the heart and when the Bible talks about the heart it means the mind, particularly the Old Testament. The heart is the idea of the mind. The heart of man is desperately wicked, it's deceitful...that's the mind. You can equate generally with the mind.

Now in the mind is a place, I suppose we might call it that although it's not an actual location, but in the mind is a capacity for imagination...for imagination. And imagination is the place where sin is conceived, where is fantasized and where sin is energized. And if we are going to control sin, it has to be controlled in the imagination. It's very difficult for us to eliminate from our lives every thought about sin because sin is ubiquitous, I mean it is everywhere. You can hear sinful words, you can sinful things, they're all around you all the time. And people thrust them in your face. It would be very difficult to remove the thought of sin, the fleeting thought, the passing thought, the awareness, the sensitivity to sin that is initial. Now where you really have to go to work is in your imagination where that initial exposure to sin develops and elicits your involvement and ultimately results in your iniquity. The imagination is where lust is activated.

Let's turn to James chapter 1 as we think about this important point. In James chapter 1, very, very insightful portion down in verses 14 and 15, very definitive and helps us as Christians in the battle with sin. First of all, in verse 13, "When you're tempted you can't say I'm being tempted by God." Somebody might say, "Well, look, I mean, I live in a fallen world and sin is all around me, what do you expect? All this stuff is there and I see it and it moves in and it captures my interest and away it goes and I didn't ask to be here, and God put me here and God let the world fall, and God let sin show up, and what am I supposed to do about it?"

"No one can say when he is tempted I am being tempted by God for God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone." Listen, the fact that you live in a fallen world and that you're exposed to sin around you all the time through personal contacts and through the media and through what you read and all of these things is not an excuse for you iniquity. It's not that initial exposure in a fallen world that is a problem.

Go back to verse 14, "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by...what?...his own...what?...lust." The problem is not environment, the problem is not exposure to something. The problem is not that it's there in the world. The problem is you and me. We are the problem. And here's how it works, verse 15, "When lust has conceived it gives birth to sin and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death."

You see, what produces sin is not something outside of us but something inside of us. Something that takes that sinful image, that sinful circumstance, that sinful situation, that sinful thought, word, concept, whatever it might be, or action that's in the world around us, and begins to internalize it. That's when the real problem develops. We are tempted when we are internally carried away by our lust and lust begins to conceive and it brings forth the child and the child is sin.

Now what is the imagination? It's the place where lust conceives. It's the place where the sin is entertained, where the temptation is entertained and the fantasies begin to develop. This is the imagination. Sin works in your imagination.

Imagination is a wonderful thing. It's a creative source inside of us. It's where artists conceive their great art. It's where...it's where musicians cultivate the music that eventually shows up on a sheet and is played by an orchestra. It's where those people who have a dream for some achievement in human life begin to cultivate that dream that ultimately comes to fruition in their life. It's a wonderful thing. We talk with children all the time about the importance of stimulating their imagination in the right way because God has given you a tremendous faculty to dream and to plan and to invent and to conceive things that you can bring to pass with great benefit and great blessing. But it is sadly in that same imagination, that same mind, that capability in the human mind where one conceives and fantasizes and develops that which ultimately issues in iniquity.

In Luke we have also a reference to the imagination, chapter 1 vs. 51, in the Magnificat of Mary where she is praising the Lord having been told she would be the mother of the Messiah.She says about the Lord in vs. 51, "He has done mighty deeds with His arm and He has scattered those who were proud in the imaginations of their heart." Here again imagination is mentioned.

Now imagination is somehow more profound than thinking. It is what energizes the thought into fantasy, what activates the emotion and the will to produce the action. The thought comes, it's energized in the imagination, that moves the emotion, the emotion moves the will, the will creates the action and in the case of sin the action creates death...as James says. It is in the imagination that your flesh comes to consciousness. It is in the imagination that the pictures outside become the pictures inside. It is in your imagination that you play out your sin before you ever commit it. It is in the imagination that you feel the heart and the anger that could issue in murder if you were not restrained and it's why Jesus said you're not obeying the law just because you don't kill someone, I'm telling you if you hate your brother you've violated the law. It's where you commit adultery in your heart, it's in your imagination. It's in that imagination in the words of James where lust conceives.

And as your imagination as a Christian functions, it has to battle...it has to battle because you know what is right and you're tempted with what is wrong. And so there are usually two thoughts engaging themselves in your imagination. One thought is this sin will bring satisfaction. This sin will bring me something I want. The other thought is, this sin will dishonor God. Both thoughts are in the mind and both thoughts have an element of truth, sin will bring you some momentary pleasure, if it didn't you wouldn't be interested in it at all. So both thoughts in a sense are true. Sin does bring satisfaction to fallen flesh, that is true, it is momentary and the price is high, and it is not an equal satisfaction to obedience, but there are, as the book of Hebrews says, the pleasures of sin for a season. It is also true that that sin dishonors God, displeases God, violates the relationship with God and brings chastening on the one who commits it. And so therein lies the battle. Which is going to triumph? Which principle? Which is going to move your emotion? Which is going to move your will to do what is right? Which is going to control your imagination? That's the battle.

That's why it is so critical to hear the words of Joshua 1:8, for example, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, you shall meditate on it day and night."Why? "So that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it." You lay the weight in the battle on the side of righteousness because the Word keeps you from sin. That's why Psalm 19:14 says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." It's very, very important how you feed your imagination...very, very important. Very important what you put in there.

Back in 1 Chronicles, and this will be the last passage we'll look at on this particular thought, chapter 29. David blessed the Lord in sight of all the assembly, and this, of course, was at the time when Solomon was being made king and David was making collections for the temple which was to be built by Solomon. And David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly and David said, verse 10, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of Israel, our Father forever and ever, Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. Indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth, Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all, both riches and honor come from Thee and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might and it lies in Thy hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name." t's just exultant joyous praise. He thanks the Lord.

And then in verse 17, "Since I know, O my God, that Thou tryest the heart and delightest in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things. So now with joy I have seen Thy people who are present here make their offerings willingly to Thee. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers preserve this forever in the imaginations of the heart of Thy people and direct their heart to Thee and give to my son, Solomon, a perfect heart to keep Thy commandments."

This was a...this was a monumental moment in the history of Israel. This was a glorious high point. And David says, "Preserve this forever in the imaginations of the heart."

Lord, if this is to go on, if this marvelous love toward you and expression of worship and this level of devotion is to continue in the future, You're going to have to preserve the imagination, the place where sin is conceived and where it brings forth its deadly child.

Beloved, that's where the battle is fought. And as I taught you some many months ago now when we were talking about the conscience in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 12, we discussed the fact that Paul said his conscience was clear. When you are fighting sin on the inside in your imagination, your conscience is battling alone. No one outside knows it. No one outside. The most important battles that you will fight alone in your imagination and your conscience will be in there ringing its bell and beating its drum and calling out to you in response to the choices you are making as Romans 2 says,

either accusing you or excusing you. That's what conscience does.

And you need to be aware that the battle has to be won there. You win the battle there and you'll win the battle on the outside. You lose the battle there and you'll lose the battle on the outside. When somebody falls into iniquity, falls into sin, That's the product of a fantasizing imagination that has conceived of sin and consequently brought it forth. Win the battle inside. The issue is you. The issue is not the world you live in, it's you.

I suppose it would be probably true that the world in which Paul lived was at least the equal of our world today in its debauchery. And I'll go beyond that. Let me tell you something. After having spent all these many months going through the Old Testament to write all these notes and to go through all of this material on the Old Testament, I don't know that I could conceive a more debauched culture than that which surrounded the nation Israel and which encroached itself upon them until even the Jews began to commit the same kind of debauchery as the nations around them. The result of that was the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. when the ten northern tribes were taken into captivity from which really they never came back, but were scattered. And then in 586 B.C. the southern kingdom, Judah and Benjamin, hauled off into Babylonian captivity. And when you read the Old Testament and why this happened, it happened because of the wretchedness and the wickedness of the people of Israel...prostitution, greed, murder, child sacrifice, I mean just horrendous kind of behavior back in Old Testament times. When you read the story of the world around the New Testament, you get very accustomed to Israel and to what was going on there and Pharisaism and an external kind of morality. But when you get out into the Gentile world where Paul was, it was debased and debauched to the degree that we know today. The only difference is that we can put it on forms of media that the ancient world didn't have.

So the battle has always been fought at the same point. There has always been the external influences. You can't run and hide from that, that's not the problem. The problem is the internal lust that is generated in an imagination that is not subject to the truth. Self-discipline then begins with our theology, knowing who owns us, knowing the price that was paid for us, remembering the covenant we made with the Lord when we came to Him, the recognition of all sin as a violation of our relationship. And then it moves out of our theology into our own personal spirituality and self-discipline becomes a matter of controlling your imagination. And if you are to do that, you must hide the Word of God in your heart so that it comes ringing loud and clear and activates your conscience.

Do you remember what I said about conscience when we taught this some...it's been now probably two years ago? Conscience is not in itself a moral law, it is merely a device that reacts to moral law. You could describe it as a skylight. It is not in itself a light. It is merely a skylight that lets the outside light in, the outside light is the truth of God, the conscience is the skylight that lets it in. And you remember, Paul said keep that clean so that the light comes in.

You could also describe conscience another way, and I did this in the book on The Vanishing Conscience. There was an airplane crash in Spain. It was a tragic crash. A plane flew right into the mountain and everybody on it was killed, Avianca Airlines. And when they got back the flight recorder this is what they heard, just a matter of minutes before the crash the synthesized-computer voice in the voice box said, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up." Inexplicably the pilot said, "Shut up, Gringo," in English and flipped off the voice box and in a matter of minutes crashed into the mountain.

Now the voice box is like conscience. Conscience says, "Pull up, pull up, stop, don't do that." And it's simply reacting to information given to it...like that airplane. A little voice box was being informed of reality. And what was informing the little voice box? Radar. And radar was reality, radar sends out a beam that bounces back and radar recognized that that plane was headed for a collision with a mountain. Radar was reality, reality informed the box and the box spoke. Now that's how conscience works. Sound doctrine is reality. Biblical understanding is reality. And if you have reality, reality informs the conscience. And where you have sound doctrine informing a clear conscience, you're going to hear...Pull up, pull up, stop, don't do this, don't do this...and you definitely want that.

Now we live in a culture which assaults that two ways. First of all, our society wants to change the moral code. So let's take the Bible and get rid of it. Let's just get rid of it. We don't want this for our moral law, so we'll invent a new one and we'll let MTV invent it. We'll come up with a brand new morality. We'll let the sexual revolution invent it and the gay and lesbian groups, we'll have them invent a new moral code. Now what? Now conscience has a problem because conscience is not a moral law, conscience is merely a device that reacts to what you believe. Muslims have conscience. Buddhists have conscience. They don't know the truth of God, but there's...the conscience is a human mechanism that reacts to your belief system.

So what happens in our society is you invent an erroneous, deceptive, lying, hellish, damning, moral system. And now what you've got is misinformation going to the conscience. So the radar doesn't work, it's non-functioning. In addition to that we have the psychology world. And what is the goal of modern psychology? The goal of modern psychology is to train people to ignore their conscience. Your conscience is making you feel guilty? That's wrong. You're not a bad person, you're...what?...you're good, you lack self-esteem. In fact, you're so much better than you think you are that it's really troublesome and most of your problems are because you don't know how good you really are. So when conscience says you're guilty, you're guilty, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, you silence that conscience.

So, on the one hand the culture develops a completely new moral system and on the other hand, it trains people to ignore their conscience. So you have a whole civilization of people flying stone blind and crashing and burning all over the place. Here we are in the midst of this as Christians who have the Word of God, who know the Word of God with a fully informed conscience and a conscience that

is told what is right and we are also told to listen to that conscience. And when the conscience says, "Pull up, don't do this, stop, do what's right," that is a God-given gift. I mean, it's paralleled on the physical side in human beings by pain. You might not think pain is a good thing, but it is. Pain is a good thing because pain tells you your body has a problem. If you don't feel any pain, you'd eventually just die because you wouldn't remedy your condition.

I remember years ago doing a study of leprosy because I was interested in what the Bible said about lepers. And so I got involved in the medical side of things and I always assumed that leprosy was a disease that ate you, cause every time I had seen a leper and I had seen a few, and every time I'd seen pictures or read about lepers or seen photos in medical books about lepers, their fingers were all gone and their noses were gone and their ears were gone and big holes were in their face and in their arms and their feet and some of their feet were completely gone and all they had was stumps. And I just assumed this is some disease that starts at the extremity and eats you. And when I studied it I found out it's not that at all, it doesn't eat you at all. What it does is kill all of your nerves so you can't feel anything and you wear off all your extremities. People who are lepers who have no nose have rubbed it off because they can't feel how hard they're rubbing and they literally rub off their extremities...rub off their ears, rub off their noses, rub off their fingers their toes, rub holes in their faces. And some of the pictures are very grotesque, you see, they can't feel anything and when you can't feel the pain of something, it's a self-destructive mode.

When pain comes, it's God's way of saying...stop doing that, you're hurting your body. And when conscience starts yelling at you, it's God's gift to you saying stop that, you're hurting your soul. And it's at the level of conscience that you have to do the battle of controlling your imagination. So keep your conscience highly informed.

You know, that's one of the wonderful benefits of being in a church and having been taught and trained the Word of God, it's wonderful for those of you who know the Word of God and know it soundly and solidly. Why? Because your conscience is fully informed and it's very important that you not believe the psychological lies today of those who want to dispossess you of any guilt and make you feel completely exonerated from any guilt of any kind. That is a very, very devastating way to silence a God-given warning system in the souls of men and women. And it's a very effective campaign, believe me. But here we are as Christians with a fully informed conscience, a fully sensitized conscience and we know enough to listen when it speaks, listen to your conscience, its built upon the Word of God and that's how you control your imagination.

All right, let me give you a fifth point and there could be many more and probably should be, but for sure I want to give you a final one and then we'll close. If you're going to be a self-disciplined person you must focus on a noble cause outside yourself...you must focus on a noble cause outside yourself. Maybe I could say it like this, people whose lives matter to God don't matter to them. You know what I mean by that? People who are lost in divine purposes have little regard for their own success,

comfort, achievement.

In Acts 20, a good place to look at that, that chapter has so much in it, it's one that we all ought to know well, but in Acts 20 Paul says in verse 22, "I'm going to Jerusalem." And he said, "I'm bound in the spirit. I mean, I'm compelled, I'm driven, I have to go. I'm on my way to Jerusalem and I don't know what will happen to me there. I know I'm going right back into the lion's mouth, I know that. I know how they feel about me, I know it could result in tragedy, imprisonment, death, I know that. Additionally...verse 23 says...I know that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Everywhere he went the word of the Holy Spirit was coming to the leaders of the church. Tell Paul that when he gets to Jerusalem and it's going to be chains and prison.

But I'm going anyway...I'm going anyway. Why? Verse 24, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." You see, the point was there was something far beyond Paul that drove him...far beyond Paul. I don't consider my life of any account as dear to myself. And that's why I said what I did. People whose lives really matter to God don't matter to them. They really don't. They are committed to a noble cause outside themselves.

Now that is true in just the simplest sense in the world. Somebody who writes masterpieces in music has a transcendent commitment to that process which causes them to be able to go on and on sleeplessly, to deny themselves all kinds of things for the greater good of achieving this noble end. Those people who have a great desire to excel in some endeavor or some academic field or some realm of science or whatever it might be in human achievement, make immense sacrifices because there's some...some noble cause beyond them. They make great sacrifices. Certainly many of the things we enjoy today were pioneered by people who sacrificed everything, in some cases their lives. And sometimes the noble cause is pretty dumb, like getting to the top of Mount Everest. Who cares? Or something like that. But it is a transcendent cause beyond them that makes people sacrifice at a level that is sometimes hard to understand. And certainly the same thing is true of us as Christians. You will begin to pull the loose ends of your life together when you aren't living for yourself anymore, when you're way beyond that. When you discipline yourself because it's the only way you can get to the goal which is beyond you. You know you can't get there with a half effort, you can't get there with a three-quarter effort. You can only accomplish that with the whole effort of everything you have, and that was the Apostle Paul, "For to me to live is not Paul, Christ."

I mean, the man approached life with one great goal, the advancement of the glory of Jesus Christ. And that transcendent noble goal beyond himself catapulted him beyond personal thoughts of comfort and created in him an immense capacity for self-discipline and self-sacrifice to achieve what was so noble. He said that everything he did he did for the glory of God. And he encouraged us whether we eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. I mean, that's the way he lived. He

said, "If I live, I live unto the Lord. If I die, I die unto the Lord. So whether I live or die, I'm the Lord's." If I go there and they put me in chains, fine. If they put me in prison, fine. If they take my life, fine. If I have to go without food and if I have to be a night and a day in the deep and sleepless nights and hunger and danger as he lists in 2 Corinthians 11, if I have to be beaten with rods and whipped and stoned and left for dead and shipwrecked. Fine. Because there is something so great and so compelling that those sacrifices are nothing, absolutely nothing. And that is the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the advancement of the gospel, the hope of some day hearing, "Well done, good and faithful steward. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Paul could pray with full commitment, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come." Because that's what consumed him. It was the advancement of God's kingdom. It was the fulfillment of God's will. It was the glory of God's name. That was it.

It's a matter of living for the great cause. It's a matter of getting beyond yourself. And that too is not easy in our world when we have the most selfish society perhaps...well certainly in the history of America and maybe in the history of humanity. Our level of selfishness is beyond description. And living in that kind of society where everything is supposed to focus on you makes it very difficult to lose your life for the cause of Christ.

As we talk about current trends in evangelicalism, this is one of the most tragic trends, this new kind of preaching that is all built around human fulfillment, this new kind of evangelizing where the whole appeal to the unconverted person is personal fulfillment, that the Lord will personally fulfill your life. Because when that's the reason for you to come to Christ, then that becomes the reason you came to Christ. And then that becomes what you expect Christ to do for you and you set people up for an utterly reverse process of sanctification. "Well, here I am, Jesus, fulfill me....Here I am, Jesus, satisfy me...Here I am, Jesus, plug up all the holes in my life, give me perfect relationships, bring me happiness, success." When, in fact, a proper attitude is, "Lord, save me for Jesus' sake, I'm not worthy of anything and somehow make my life useful to You for the advance of Your Kingdom, even if it costs me everything." That's living for the noble cause. That's getting beyond yourself and that's absolutely essential.

You see, the matter of self-discipline is a matter of right thinking, it's a matter of the battle on the inside. It's a matter of remembering who owns you, remembering the covenant you made when you promised to be obedient and maintaining the integrity of that promise, recognizing sin as a violation of your relationship to the Lord and learning to control your imagination, that part of your mind where lust conceives and produces sin and that is controlled by the profound knowledge of the Word of God and being instantly responsive to a sensitive conscience. And then finally in our list of five, living your life for a noble cause that's far beyond you.

Criticism all of a sudden doesn't matter, personal failure doesn't matter, personal reputation doesn't matter, personal comfort doesn't matter. Only one thing matters and that is the advancement of the glory of God and the honor of Jesus Christ in His Kingdom. And that's all there is to live for. And when those things begin to compel you, then you are motivated to spiritual self-discipline. And I thank the Lord with all my heart that so many of you are and it's evident in your life and it's evident in this church. Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, our hearts are encouraged with the truth, so encouraged because You've shown us how to live, how to order our life. But we're at the same time discouraged because knowing what we know we seem to fail so often. Help us, Lord, to be strong in the inner man, to have spiritual self-discipline that causes us to win the battle on the inside and therefore to be triumphant on the outside. Give Your church this discipline. May we all see the reality of these patterns in our hearts and when we fail to see them, may we repent and ask Your Spirit to renew us because we want to be disciplined because it honors You and it makes us useful and fruitful. And what else is there in this life but that we should bear fruit for eternity? So help us, Lord, to tie up all the loose ends, to nail down everything that's flapping in the breeze, to establish our priorities on Your Word and maintain them for Your glory until Jesus comes, in His name we pray. Amen.

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