

Some Assembly Required – Part 3, Self-Control

A mile upstream from Niagara Falls, the Welland River joins the Niagara River. Right where they meet, a passenger bridge arches across the Welland. Boaters can navigate beneath it and enter the wide flow of the Niagara. But before they do, they pass under a large sign posted on the bridge's pylon. It asks them two questions (do you remember them from last week?): **Do you have an anchor? Do you know how to use it?**

So many Christians commend to others a life they don't seem to live themselves, posing as tour guides to territory on which they've never set foot. The life they actually live seems to be only a cruel parody of the dreams they've dreamed. They've told themselves a thousand times that it won't happen again. They've repented so many times that it's beyond counting. They struggle often ... regularly ... constantly ... and they ask themselves "why isn't my faith in God enough?"

Over the last two weeks, we have dived headfirst into the Apostle Peter's simple yet irritating claim that he knew the answer to this dilemma: "You already have everything you need for life and godliness!" You already have the anchor, you just need to know how to use it. You already have faith, now here's the secret – **"GIVING ALL DILIGENCE, ADD TO YOUR FAITH."** Some assembly is required. You have all the pieces you need, and all the necessary instructions – now, just put them together!

2 Peter 1:1-11 ¹ Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ³ **According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,** through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵ **And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.** ⁸ For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ¹⁰ Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: ¹¹ For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the last two weeks, we have talked about adding GOODNESS (not the actions of DOING good, but the reality of BEING good), and we have talked about KNOWLEDGE (not WHAT do I know, but WHO do I need to know). And goodness must be added to our faith before we add knowledge, because knowledge contains the toxin PRIDE, and the only antitoxin is goodness. Apart from goodness, knowledge is often wielded to humiliate, intimidate or alienate others – instead of being used as a tool to bless and build up others. Unless knowledge is placed on the foundation of goodness, we become nothing more than spiritual snobs!

People who get knowledge in front of goodness are often quite generous with their opinions. ☺ They seem to know everything about God. But they are like the medieval cartographers who inscribed uncharted areas with the words "Terra Incognita" (unknown earth) and later the warning "Hic Sunt Dracones" (here be dragons). They attempted to cover up their ignorance with speculation, opinions and dark warnings.

The third piece in Peter's puzzle is SELF-CONTROL ("temperance"), and it arrives just in time! Why? Because spiritual disciplines tend to have an unintended effect – they make us "proud of our humility." ☺ We start to congratulate ourselves for having mastered truth, and begin to fancy ourselves God's "favorites." We begin to look with pity and disdain upon everyone else, and we begin to see that if they would just follow our advice everything would be right in the church and in the world! ☺

Biblically, self-control is more than merely keeping our instincts and urges in check! It has mostly to do with our MINDS, because it is a trained capacity to THINK CLEARLY ABOUT WHAT MATTERS MOST. It is a disciplined attentiveness to God, a shrewd awareness of the devil's tactics, and a heightened sensitivity to spiritual reality. SELF-CONTROL IS REALLY ABOUT PAYING ATTENTION. Long before it becomes about "holding yourself back" it is the ability to discern things as they really are and ACT IN LIGHT OF THAT WISDOM.

Peter mentions self-control only once in his second letter, but he gives us more information about it in his first letter. There, he always pairs self-control with alertness and preparedness of the mind. And he gives us three situations where self-control literally "makes or breaks" us ...

1 Peter 1:13-16 **Wherefore** gird up the loins of your mind, **be sober,** and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

SELF-CONTROL (“be sober”) is the response God wants to the great gift of salvation He has given (“wherefore” – look back to v. 1-12). Doesn’t that seem like a trivial response? But without self-control, people can walk away from the only thing that has ever given them life! Without self-control, we can easily become a backslidden prodigal or an arrogant older brother. When we don’t have self-control, we don’t cherish and safeguard the great salvation we’ve received ... and in our carelessness we let enemies walk in and plunder us in broad daylight.

1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: **be ye therefore sober,** and watch unto prayer.

One day very soon, the world as we know it will be over. That day is nearer than any of us really think. It is nearer than all our daily duties and distractions allow us to believe. BUT IT COULD HAPPEN TODAY.

Both of Peter’s letter attempt to fire our awareness and heighten our anticipation of the coming of the Lord. It will be a terrible day for those who are not ready, but we are told to look forward to it. And what is our response to this looming destiny with eternity? We are to PRAY. No dramatics, just discipline. Get a grip on yourself ... and PRAY. Why this advice? Because the one thing we are least inclined to do when all hell breaks loose is to head for the prayer closet! We don’t storm heaven, we just storm about like a little tornado of busyness and worry. TO PRAY UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES TAKES GREAT SELF-CONTROL.

LEARN TO PRAY BEFORE YOU REACT!

1 Peter 5:8 **Be sober,** be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

The devil is the ultimate predator, and the more effective you become for God the more you will become his target. There is not one case of demon possession in the Old Testament, but as soon as Jesus entered His ministry they came crawling out of the woodwork! When we get busy, Satan gets busy ... like the ever-escalating war on terror we see today.

Jesus promised us that we would do even greater things than He did, and that makes the devil angry (and hungry to devour!). So he prowls and looks for someone with their guard down, someone getting a little sloppy, someone not paying attention ... and he pounces!

The best defense is always a good offense – we need SELF-CONTROL. If we are PREPARED IN ADVANCE, we will automatically react properly when the moment of attack comes. (i.e. Jack Groppel’s training center in Florida everglades, fake “wild boar”, football players, CIA agents – football players fled, but CIA agents reacted according to their training).