

The Third Step: Self-Control



Progress to Perfection (Part 6)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week sharing with you Keys To Successful Living that God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

First, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It encourages me greatly to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So, please take time to write to me—even if it's only a brief note.

This week I'm continuing with the theme that I began but did not complete last week, "Progress to Perfection."

Last week I pointed out how essential it is to have a goal in life. Without this we merely drift, we're like a ship at sea without rudder or anchor, carried about with every wind and current. And, very often the end of a life lived like that is shipwrecked. We need a goal. We need a purpose and we need to know how to attain that goal.

In the Christian life there are two distinct but related goals. The first is the goal of external accomplishment, what we do for God. The second, but related, is the goal of internal development, what we become in God. And I've pointed that we cannot separate the two. What we do for God ultimately must be consistent with what we are in God. We have to be in line with what we claim to do.

Now, in my present talks I'm dealing with the goal of internal development. In the sermon on the mount Jesus states this goal as a commandment in two words, "Be perfect." He also sets the standard "as your Father is in heaven." So, we're not left with any doubt as to what the will of God for us is. We are to be perfect, the standard, as perfect as our Father in heaven.

I used the comparison of the word round. Every circle is round but circles differ in size. Anything that is not round is not a circle. God is the great circle that encompasses the universe. We can be just tiny, little circles, each one in our own allotted place. But God expects every circle to be round. He expects us to be as perfect in our tiny dimension as he is

in his tremendous dimension. It's quality we're talking about rather than quantity.

In the latter part of last week we saw that the apostle Peter sets before us seven successive steps to attain our God-given goal. These are stated in 2 Peter 1:4-7. Speaking about God's provision for us in Christ, Peter says:

> "He has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

And then he goes on:

> "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

We see there two things. First, the goal is stated both positively and negatively. Positively, the goal is to participate in God's nature, to become partakers of God's own nature. The negative consequence of this is that we escape the world's corruption. But Peter also sets forth the practical steps to attain this goal. The starting point is faith. The seven successive steps that follow from faith that lead upward from faith to the attainment of our goal are these: One, goodness; two, knowledge; three, self control; four, perseverance; five, godliness; six, brotherly kindness; seven, love. Love is the goal. It is the nature of God.

Last week I spoke about the first two steps, goodness and knowledge. I explained that goodness is probably translated excellence. It's not just moral goodness, though of course that's important, but it's general excellence. Our faith should enable us to lead lives of excellence in whatever area we are in. For carpenters, we should be excellent carpenters. If we're teachers we should be excellent teachers. If we're housewives we should be excellent housewives, and so on.

Then the second step, knowledge. It's not intellectual knowledge but it's spiritual knowledge that comes primarily from the scriptures, the word of God. It's knowledge that enables us to know and do the will of God.

Today I'm going to speak about the third step, self control. Some people don't like the idea that there is any room for self control in the Christian life. They say, "Well, doesn't God do it all?" The answer is definitely not! Salvation initially is entirely from God. But, as we progress he requires our cooperation with him. And, our cooperation sets the limits for what God can do for us. This is stated by Paul in Philippians 2:12–13.

> "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence; continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure."

You see, there are two sides. God works in insofar as we work out. But if we stop working out we give God no more opportunity to work in. Self control is part of our working out what God wants to work in. The obvious example and one which is used in Scripture is that of the athlete. In today's world we are continually confronted with athletes. On television athletics is one of the major attractions and, of course, we are familiar with the world Olympics every four years and really dominate the television screen for a number of days. Let me say, I myself enjoy being a spectator of athletics. I think it's a very interesting and challenging thing. But, athletics sets a standard for us as Christians. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.

> "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown of laurel that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man shadow boxing. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

I think the key phrase there is every one who competes in the game goes into strict training. That's for temporal success, to gain a temporal reward. In the old days it was a laurel wreath. In our times it's a gold medal. But, whatever it is it's something temporary, it's something of this world. But we are promised a reward that will be eternal, a crown of glory that will not fade away. Paul says that if athletes have to go into training to win their medal or prize, how much more should we go into training to win our eternal, imperishable medal or prize? So, going into training, applying discipline, self control, is an essential for success in the Christian life.

I want to speak to you about three specific areas in which we need to apply self control as Christians. These areas are one,

our physical appetites; two, our thoughts; and three, our words. I'll briefly glance at these three areas.

First of all, the area of physical appetites. Paul says in Philippians 3:18–19:

> "First, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

You see, these people are not enemies of Christ. They claim to be Christians. They're enemies of his cross. That in their life which demands self denial and self control, they are not wiling to accept. And Paul's words about them are terrible. "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomachs, and their glory is in their shame." The question for you and me is, Does my stomach control me or do I control my stomach? Am I controlled by my appetites or are they my servants? Only self control will enable us to make our appetites our servants and God's servants.

And then the area of our thoughts. In Philippians 4:7–9 Paul says:

> "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable; if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Paul starts with "the peace of God" and he ends with "the God of peace." And he says if you want peace you've got to discipline your thoughts. You've got to control what you think about. He names eight things that we have to practice thinking about: what is true, what is noble, what is right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. Feed your mind on the positive and you won't be overcome by the negative. But if you are always occupied with negative things, don't expect to have a positive Christian life.

And finally, one Scripture about the control of our tongues and our words in James 1:26.

> "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."

That's very clear. If we claim to be religious we've got to control our tongue. Let me suggest to you that people who are gossips or slanderers, or always using exaggerations or idle words cannot claim to be, by Bible standards, religious. They have not achieved self control in that area.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back again with you tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing further with you on this week's theme, "Progress to Perfection."

Radio Program

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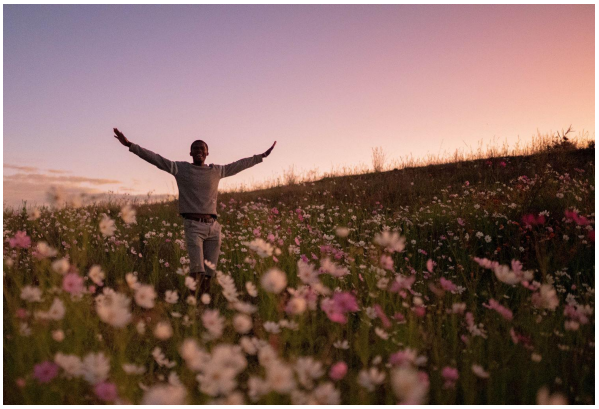

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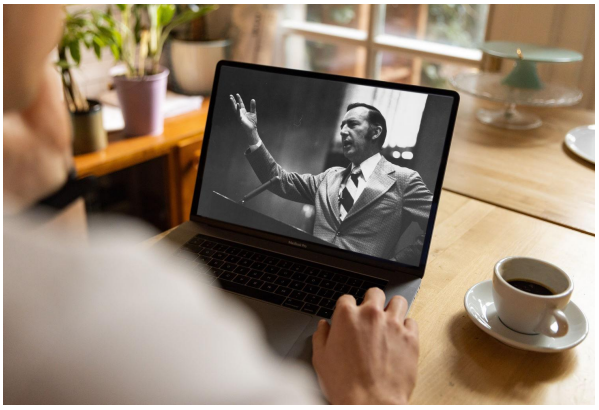

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