

Take Heed To Your Character

by Don Currin

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining character and perseverance in the face of apostasy. It highlights the need to watch closely over oneself, both in actions and beliefs, to preserve one's faith and influence others positively. The speaker discusses the six-part message focusing on character, conscience, counsel, gospel, sound doctrine, and experiential truth, urging listeners to cultivate sensitivity to Christ's presence.

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Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:16, 1 Timothy 6:11, Proverbs 4:23, Romans 14:22, Luke 10:41

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Description

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Transcript

Let me share with you where I'm going tonight. About some months ago, I was in preparation for a series of messages that I took from one verse of scripture in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 16. If you recall the verse, it says in essence this, take heed to yourself and to the doctrine or the teaching and persist in them for in so doing you both save yourself and those who hear you.

Now you know when you go through the epistle of 1 Timothy, oftentimes you will focus on certain themes and you think well this is a reason for the letter and that may be true to some measure. But what I saw that was an underlying principle and I believe the primary reason for the epistle was it was a warning against apostasy. And so we see in that verse that I just quoted to you the importance of perseverance, that we must watch closely ourselves, not only what we are but also what we believe because in so doing as we continue to cultivate that conscientiousness, we both save ourselves, we preserve ourselves and those who are entrusted to us in our sphere of influence, particularly in our home.

So tonight what we want to do is I'll give you first of all the six-part message which Brother James has asked me if I would deal with the subject of character tonight, but basically the six-part series consisted of these titles. When we talked about take heed to yourself, we talked about take heed to your conscience,

take heed to your character, take heed to your counsel that you give others and you believe yourself. And then in regard to the teaching or the doctrine, take heed to the gospel and it's interesting even missionaries at times tend to forget the saving elements of the gospel.

With all this temptation and pressure, you know, being enticed with the gospel of moralism or decisionism or syncretism or other things, oftentimes suddenly we forget what are some of the more essential vital components to the gospel coming and saving power. So we talked about taking heed to the gospel, taking heed to sound doctrine, and then taking heed to, now listen to this, experiential truth. Exposition, brothers, is a good thing but never allow it to be an end in itself.

It must be a means to an end that you might know the experiential reality of the felt Christ. He is real and we can cultivate such a sensitivity and an awareness of his presence and I believe it'll make all the difference in the world and that in itself will be a safeguard against this insidious plague of apostasy in our hour. So tonight if you would, let's go to the book of 1 Timothy, the epistle there, 1 Timothy chapter 4. And by the way, I'll give you a heads up, I use a hodgepodge of translations when I preach, not to confuse people but for clarity.

So you'll find in my notes many times there's Old King James, New King James, NASB and ESV, okay? So you guys just be flexible and bear with me here. I'm reading tonight out of the ESV and let's go first of all to verse 16 that I just quoted from another version a moment ago. Paul says in chapter 4, 16, keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.

Persist in this for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Now for the benefit of those who may be here tonight, and you might think from that verse that salvation has everything to do with my effort, that's not what the verse is talking about and the Word of God is not promoting a salvation by works. But rather what he's talking about, those who have made a profession of faith, they preserve their life by continuing in the very works that they have been created to undertake and fulfill in their life as a Christian.

So when we talk about doing here and we save ourselves by doing, we're not talking about earning our salvation. We're talking about people who profess faith in Christ. They say they know the Lord and the evidence of that faith in Christ is that they will persevere, continue in holiness.

And then thus doing they preserve themselves. Now it's interesting as we looked at these six different subjects, the heart, crime, missionaries, and I, that throughout the epistle you'll have at least three or four, sometimes as many as five different portions of scripture in this epistle that relates to those specific things. Conscience, character, counsel, gospel, sound teaching, and experiential truth.

And to observe ourself in those areas, to make sure that we maintain a close watch on those areas once again insulates us against the apostasy in this hour. Serene Pradhan, who has been here before, and he is our Eastern European coordinator on the other side of the big pond, after the conference was over he said, Brother Don, he said, I've never known you to be so intense and so hard as you were in this conference. And the missionaries sat there with rapt attention.

You could tell, I mean, that it was awakening agent for them as they listened to these messages. He said, but you were so intense and so hard. Why is that? And I began to share with him about some brothers that have been very close to me, whether they were just laymen or ministers or vocational ministers who in my wildest imagination never dreamed that they would fall away from the faith and renounce Jesus Christ.

And they did. I'm telling you, men, Ravi Zacharias is just the tip of the iceberg. And as I told Brother James, it's as easy for men to apostatize from a pulpit as it is from a saloon or from pornography.

So understand tonight, this is a call in this dark hour that we need to closely watch ourselves. And so tonight, the assignment that I've been giving is we want to talk about take heed to your character. Now think about a few thoughts here.

In this session, we want to focus on this particular subject of the disposition or the nature of character. You see, to take heed to yourself, gentlemen, is to take heed to your character. The word here defined as character is a disposition, now listen, a disposition of those moral qualities and patterns of life that characterize one's true identity.

Great definition. Very succinct, but solid in reality. Listen to it again.

It can be defined as a disposition of those moral qualities and patterns of life that characterize one's true identity. It's interesting that throughout this letter to Timothy, Paul reminds him of how vital character is in leadership as well as personal walk. So when we look at these portions tonight that talk about character, he's not just speaking to leaders, he's talking about professors of Christ's religion in general.

His exhortation also in the context is to lay hands suddenly on no man. And whether I travel across the United States and Canada or whether I'm in different parts of the world, this is the thing that I'm like a battering ram that I'm emphasizing to our missionaries and those pastors, those spiritual leaders. Brothers, listen, you might need a deacon, you might need an elder in your church, but I want to caution you, do not lay hands suddenly on any man.

In Adam Martin's lecture series entitled, *What's Wrong With Preaching Today*, he says this, quotes, it is no surprise to me that preaching has fallen upon bad days when the clear priorities of these ministerial requirements have been set aside. In ordination councils, men are grilled for hours in an attempt to discover their ability to refute heretics on minute theological points, now listen, whereas seldom is any question asked regarding advances in personal and domestic piety. Domestic piety, did you catch it? Which factors, he says, the apostle Paul placed at the top of the list of ministerial requirements.

Now, if you would look at what he is referring to in first Timothy chapter number six, first Timothy chapter six, and beginning in verse number one, he says, let all who are under a yoke as bond servants regard their own masters as worthy of all honors so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers. Rather, they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.

He proceeds in giving what are false teachers, sketching the character, and what is true contentment. But what I want you to see is, beginning in verse number 11, the emphasis once again on character. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness, fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of the eternal life, notice there, there's perseverance, lay hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is interesting is in those verses, particularly in

verses 11 and 12, he's talking about the importance of character. Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

This is reverting back to his emphasis once again on character in this epistle. Now think about this for a moment. In chapter 3 of this epistle, Paul gives Timothy a list of qualifications that should be evident in a potential elder or deacon.

Interestingly, brethren, some of them are character qualities. Those he calls attention to for pastors are self-control, listen, good behavior, non-violent behavior, they are non-argumentative, and they are not greedy. While for those who are considered to serve as deacons, it's interesting he stresses the character traits of reverence, honest speech, moderation in the use of wine and money, and not being hypocritical in practice.

Now note this if you would, we're building. In verse number nine, he says that they should be holding the mystery of the faith in a, watch now, pure conscience. One man says that conscience is the organ of faith.

Long before a man begins to be led astray and go down the road spiraling downward in a state of spiritual declension to what apostasy, he compromises his conscience first. It's very important, gentlemen, that you exercise yourself to have a good conscience before God and man. Now, Al Barnes made this very pithy statement.

A mere orthodox faith was not all that was necessary in Paul's stress here in this epistle, but it was possible that a man might be firm in the belief of the truths of revelation and yet be corrupt in his heart. For some reason, it seems these days in my interaction with people and hearing so much that's coming down the pike by virtue of my association with heart cry, that it seems that there are so many men that profess the name of Christ today that it's so easy for them to practice secret sin and live an entirely different life behind the scenes. This is alarming.

And so his point is well made here as you'll see in the character. Now, interestingly enough, as you read further on the epistle, Paul encourages Timothy with an additional emphasis on character. Look, if you would, at 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 12.

He exhorts him, let no man despise your youth, but be an example of the believers in word, in conversation or behavior, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Now, I know that in some English translations of the Bible, the word spirit there is not mentioned. But here's the thought behind what he's exhorting Timothy to do.

This time when he mentions character in this particular passage, the apostle charges Timothy with a personal injunction. Now, this is important. Listen.

Because he is so young, Timothy is challenged to cultivate a character that will not cause men to look down on him for his youth. His exhortation here consists of at least five areas of character that men will censor him in. First of all, they are verbal communication.

He says, be thou an example in word. Now, what does this mean? What are the implications of that, brethren? It means very simply in his verbal responses to people, his passing comments, the comments that he makes and the questions at times that he raises in conversation. Sometimes they may lack in discretion.

Sometimes they may engender criticism. But what he's talking about here is that, Timothy, be sure that the word of God governs your speech. And that encompasses a wide range of implications, gentlemen.

I'll just say this in passing. One thing, we know that the Scripture says that in the multitude of words there is warmth, not sin. The more you talk, the greater tendency there is to end up saying something that you'll regret because you know that it's greed of the Spirit of God.

But I'm finding, particularly these days among young men, they just love to talk excessively. And sometimes they do that because they're looking your eye and they're looking for a point of affirmation or approval, and they'll keep talking until they get it. We need to be cautious about our tongue.

It's not just the questions we raise. It's not just the conversation we engage in, but oftentimes it's excessive speech. And can we really say that the Word of God is governing over our speech? Let no man despise your youth, but first of all, be an example in word.

Secondly, he says, behavior. It denotes moods or gestures or actions. Sometimes we're rejected, and rather than going outward with it to voice our complaint, we withdraw our spirits.

We swoon into a depression. We withdraw from the group. It's our behavior that is so important that we exemplify the very character of Christ or righteousness in this area.

Furthermore, he talks about love here, and what it suggests is an unconditional love toward people. But the way you treat people, you don't do it because of the way they treat you, but rather it's a reciprocating thing. I choose to still love in spite of the fact that I may be the object of someone else's contents.

He goes on to say, be an example in faith. It's not referring here to the gospel or truth, but rather a composure. Now listen, a composure of unwavering confidence in the face of trials, and it's inevitable.

We go through difficulties. We go through times where our faith is tested, and what Paul is saying, make sure that you maintain a composure in the face of trials that reveals a conviction, a conviction of faith. Furthermore, he says an immoral purity.

Once again, the emphasis is on character. Now it's interesting here, it suggests in the way of implication a testimony of watchfulness. In other words, our eyes are fixed upon objects that reflect that we have a conviction of righteousness.

I remember being with a pastor one time, and I watched him. As we're sitting there and talking back and forth over lunch, the waitress is waiting on our table. When she would come and walk away, his eyes would dart.

He would look at her. He would fixate upon her. His roving eyes revealed that there was something going on behind the scenes.

Oftentimes, we delight in subjecting our ears to things that are unbecoming to holiness. The idea of purity here is that we guard our lives and we direct our feet in such a way that we promote the grace of discretion, that I'm careful about where I traffic, I'm careful about who I associate with, because my actions in those areas reveal my purity of life. So Paul is telling Timothy, these five areas at least, I want you to exemplify character in, because in so doing, what you do is you are promoting a testimony that will not reproach the name of Christ, and no man as a result will despise your youth.

Now look at another. I said, take heed to your character. And here's another reference that we read a moment ago in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 11 and 12.

He said, but thou, O man of God, flee these things and follow after righteousness, look at the character, and godliness, and faith, and love, and patience, and meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, and in so doing you lay hold on eternal life. Now it's interesting, gentlemen, those things that he says that they are to flee from are the things mentioned in the previous verses.

Namely, literally in the Greek, it means these abominations. What's he specifically talking about? Now track with me here. Strife of words.

In other words, invoking conversation that would cause division. And then he says, and worldly gain, or the idea is a wicked resolution to be wealthy, to be rich, to live beyond your means. Now here's what I want you to see.

Interestingly, Paul refers to Timothy as a man of God here, and then engages him to be aggressive and thorough in three areas of obedience. I don't know if you saw or not, but when you study these Greek words, the words flee, follow, and fight. They are terms of aggression.

You cannot be casual in your walk with God. You must be on the offense. I come from a state that's probably worse than the state of Texas, that men are just absolutely obsessed with the idol of football.

In our neighborhood, if you were to drive down the street during football season, it's Auburn, Alabama, Auburn, Alabama, Auburn, Alabama. Years ago, during the national championship game between Alabama and Clemson, Clemson had a tremendous quarterback, but Alabama on defense had eight All-Americans. What was amazing to me, the strategy of that quarterback and ultimately a reflection of the coaching staff, he kept that All-American defensive unit on the field practically the whole game and wore them down.

My point is this, you can't play defense all the time in your Christian life. You've got to go on the offense. You've got to be aggressive.

I remind you, the Bible says the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. It's the violent that take it by force. And here is Paul exhorting Timothy, O man of God, flee these things.

Timothy must flee the allurements of the world. He must pursue character qualities that afford a good testimony and do not reproach the name of Christ and fight in faith to overcome that which would prohibit him from laying hold of eternal life. Now watch this.

In view of the general admonition back in 1 Timothy 4 16, to keep a close watch on yourself and this emphasis on character in chapter 6 that we read a moment ago, what I want to do is share a few things with you in the way of practical implication to ensure a sound ministry and more importantly the preservation of your soul. Now follow with me here. The first thing I want to emphasize is I encourage you tonight to aim for godliness above all things.

I know this is a church that's very conscientious of serving God on the mission field. I'm so glad I know some of the men that you've sent out from the church, some of the people that have been sent out of this ministry. And I'm grateful for the heightened awareness of serving Christ.

But listen friend, make sure that in your heart of hearts that you're genuinely born again. If you're not pursuing godliness in your life, please do not pursue a ministry. You remember those that came to our Lord.

Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. And what did he say? Don't you rejoice in that, but you rejoice in this, that your names are written in the book of life. Think about this for a moment.

In 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 7, he says, but refuse profane and old wives fables and exercise cultivate rather your life unto godliness. For bodily exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable, watch now, unto all things. And this is what's so significant to note.

He continues by saying, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. What's Paul saying? How do we ensure that we are a part of God's heavenly kingdom? How do we know that we're in the faith? It's because we are pursuing. We are living in such a way and cultivating godliness in our life in such a way that will ensure us that we have the promise of the life to come.

Think about this for a moment. Our desire for godliness is short-lived if we attempt to obtain it apart from discipline. There is no shortcut to holiness.

Talking about it will not produce it. Studying it will not guarantee it. You can aspire to it for years and never acquire it.

You see, gentlemen, until you apply a regimen of discipline, you will only entertain the prospects but know nothing of its reality. This is important. Now listen.

Paul tells Timothy to refuse the tales that old women are propagating, that people are being drawn into. In other words, he says, do not let these fables distract you, Timothy. Make best use of your time by giving yourself over to those disciplines that bear the fruit of godly character.

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but there are so many allurements these days in ecclesiastical circles that seem to draw our minds and our hearts and our conversations away to them to the detriment of gospel emphasis. One morning in heart cry, Paul walks in. And brother Paul says to us as a staff, he said, we've been being bombarded with requests.

When is when is Washington going to make a statement about social justice? And Paul said, I'm not doing it. And you better not do it because he says it's a diversion from the gospel. And these things like fables and stories and philosophies and everything that's coming down the pike these days, that's the value of the body of Christ, friend.

We don't realize it, but it's a delusion. It's a diversion from the gospel. To ensure certainty as to whether we are after what we are after, consider the definition of godliness.

Have you thought about it? It is the life of God in the soul of man. You see, to be godly is to simply be godlike. But what produces godliness? This is important.

Now, listen, what produces godliness in the lives of God's people? Once again, the text tells us we must employ and maintain discipline. Here's the thing we need to understand once again, and perhaps we already know this, but it's just a good wake-up call. But brothers, real Christianity is in the passive tense.

It's not passivity, but when I say in the passive tense, we are being acted upon. In other words, as I subject myself to the agencies of the word of God and meditation and secret prayer and the internalization of Scripture, then the Spirit of God comes and acts upon me to work those things in my life by imparting conviction and developing Christlike character. The text tells us we must employ and maintain discipline.

Therefore, let me just, in passing, in the way of practical application, suggest three disciplines that produce godly character. I hope this will help you. First of all, I find in my life as a Christian these days that quietness and solitude is vital to my spiritual development.

There are many men that cannot be alone with God. They've always got to be entertained. They've always got to have somebody to hang out with.

They must have music to listen to in the background. The virtues of silence and solitude complement one another, and they are vital to spiritual development. Let me explain.

It is difficult to fixate upon anything when the mind is taken captive by a flurry of distractions. You see, intentional quietness and being alone provides a foundation for godliness. And I would add, you've got to fight for it.

It's not going to come automatically. You've got to fight for it. You've got to throw yourself into an atmosphere of cultivating spiritual disciplines.

Jesus said this, the light of the body is the eye, and if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. This is an illustration. Listen.

But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness. Guess what he's speaking of? Apostasy.

What does this word single mean? He uses it to describe the condition of the eye, the mind's eye. The word literally means in the Greek, well-folded, and suggests something that is well cared for. Vincent, in his word study, says the picture is that of a piece of cloth or material neatly folded once and without a variety of complicated folds.

In other words, what Christ is emphasizing is, in the context, be single-minded. Don't let anything distract you. Draw your attention away.

Cloud your mind's eye from that which is most important, and that is Christ and his kingdom first. You see, when the eye is directed steadily toward an object, and it is in health, everything is clear and plain. If it vibrates, being fixed on no single object, nothing is seen clearly.

Everything, gentlemen, is dim and confused. The man, therefore, is unsteady in his spiritual walk. The eye regulates the motion of the body, so to have an object distinctly in view is necessary in order to correct and regulate action.

I don't know if you're a Tim Keller fan or not. He was asked the question, why the young generation had such a difficult time grasping the eternal, and he replied, noise and distraction. It's easier to tweet than it is to pray.

That's where we are today. Can you control your thinking? Can you discipline your mind's eye? Can you shut out distractions? This is essential to cultivate godliness in one's life in order to lay hold of eternal life.

Secondly, here's another discipline, and that is the discipline of single-mindedness.

Gentlemen, I remind you, Jesus said, if your mind be single, your body is full of light again. But if your mind is evil, the body is full of darkness. Now, think about this.

Seeking the kingdom of God requires deliberate effort to fixate the mind on that which is eternal. I don't know if you've read the book by Donald Whitney, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life* or *The Christian Disciplines of the Christian Life*, but he made a statement in the introductory part of the book and, of course, continued to reiterate it, and that was, discipline without direction is drudgery. It is imperative that we are single-minded.

You see, a believer who fights in faith against double-mindedness advantages himself to attain godly character. But here's the final thing I give you in the way of discipline. There is a discipline of beholding Christ in the Scriptures.

Sometimes I'm asked to do men's conferences or just men's get-togethers, and they ask me to speak on biblical manhood. And this is one of the assignments I give. You really want to be like Christ.

Any man that's in the faith has the seeds of desiring to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. I say, let me encourage you to do something. Take your Bible and a notebook.

Begin in the book of Matthew and begin reading, and every verse or every snippet of truth that you see Christ in, write down that phrase, write down that verse. Meditate upon it and write out a brief commentary of one or two paragraphs at the most about what you see in Christ in that portion of truth. Take that with you for the day, meditating upon it, fixing your mind's eye upon what you've seen in that verse about Christ.

And I want to assure you, gentlemen, within six months, everybody in your family, everybody outside your family that you run in close association with will see a difference, a marked difference in your character. Now, why is that the case? Because here's the passage, 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. But we all with open face, unveiled face, beholding him as in a glass, in the mirror of God's word, are changed into that same image from one degree of glory to another, even as by the Lord, the Spirit.

And I challenge you tonight, I might suggest this to get a reliable commentary to give you additional thoughts as you write out your own commentary. But if you take, if you start looking at Christ, you consider his character, his counsel, his worldview, the way he dealt with people, the way he responded to situations, write down those things and take it with you from day to day. I'm going to tell you something, the Spirit of God will begin to work on you and conform you to the image of Christ.

This discipline of beholding Christ. Secondly, here's another thing, I'll just give you three points tonight, but the second point is learn to actively seek godliness. Take heed to your character, watch it closely.

Listen to what Paul once again said in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 11 and 12. But you, O men of God, flee these things, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness, and fight the good fight of faith. Now you'll notice in verse 11, the word follow.

It speaks of a passionate pursuit. In other words, gentlemen, I remind you again, it's not casual or something that's flippant. It's something very aggressive.

In other words, we move at a fast pace to attain this. We run well. And the idea here is because we know that how we run the race has everything to do whether we possess eternal life or not.

The ultimate goal is that I might obtain everlasting life in my pursuit of my walk with God of Christ. Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 27. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize.

Now notice the words, run in such a way, in such a way. It matters how you run. Are you disciplining yourself under godliness? That's running in an acceptable way, in a way that has a preserving effect upon your soul.

And in a sense, and everyone who competes for the prize is temperate, self-controlled. There it is, in all things, in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Now don't miss this, verse 26. Therefore, he says, Paul, I run thus not with uncertainty and thus I fight not as one who beats the air. In other words, what Paul is saying is, I don't shadow box.

When I draw back in my discipline and in my pursuit of godliness, I unleash my blow with the intention of making it count solemnly. We're not like those who beat the air. But I discipline, there it is, my body and I bring it into subjection, lest when I preach to others I myself should become cast away, disqualified.

He's not talking about losing a reward. He speaks of the possibility of losing his soul. This quote that I'm about to give you is pregnant with reality and sobriety.

Listen to what Al Barnes admonished with, quote, many an effort of Christians is merely beating the air. The energy is expended for nothing. There's a lack of wisdom or skill or perseverance on their part.

There's a failure of plan or there's a mistake in regard to what is to be done and what should be done. Now please listen. There is often among Christians very little aim or object.

There is no plan and the efforts are wasted, scattered, inefficient efforts. So at the close of their life, many men may say that he has spent his ministry or his Christian course, his life, mainly or entirely, watch this now, beating the air. Now this is what's so engaging.

Listen to this. They fancy error and heresy in others and oppose that. They become heresy hunters or they oppose some irregularity in religion that if left alone, Mr. Barnes said, would die of itself.

Or they fix all their attention upon some minor evil and they devote their lives to the destruction of that alone. When death comes, they may have never struck a blow at the one of the real and dangerous enemies of the gospel. And the simple record on their tombstone of many ministers and many Christians might be here lies one who spent their life beating the air.

That's wasting your life. Brothers, we must not flee without an object in view. We must not run aimlessly.

What we are pursuing is far more important than what we are leaving behind. I must know the value of the prize. And when I've been able to grasp the infinite worth of it, I'm able to preserve my life.

So discipline is a good thing. But what is the aim in view? Is it Christ and his gospel? Some people ask me sometime, well, what do you think really drives Paul Washer? No doubt it's the gospel. There's no abate of him writing and meditating on the gospel.

It's the atoning beauties of the Lamb that drives him. On four different occasions, he said to me, he said, you know, brother Don, I don't know very much. That's just Washer modesty.

I don't know very much. But he said, there's one thing I know is that Christ loves me. He loves me.

And how does he know that? Because he takes the time consistently to plumb the depths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the thing that amazes me, brethren. I'm blessed.

I'm so encouraged to know that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And I'm quite enamored with the fact that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. But to think about it, the driving force I find in my life these days is that Jesus loves me.

He loves me. I'm not going to hell because he suffered and paid my sin price, my sin debt. So tonight, thirdly, the third and final point is I would encourage you to aggressively pursue godliness as an assurance of salvation.

This is a preserving agent. Once again, we go back to first Timothy chapter four, verse 16. Watch closely.

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, to the truth, the sound teaching. Continue in them. It's painstaking at times.

It can be encumbering, but continue in them for in doing this, you preserve, you save yourself and those that hear you. What am I saying tonight? Yes, we're kept by the power of God alone. Yes, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

But friend, if we're in Christ, we will persevere. The only reason we persevere in faith is because we're preserved by the power of God. So the only reason.

So think of this. If godly character is neglected, whether in the life of a minister or a professing believer, the professing believer will spiritually spiral downward. All of life is a test, primarily to test the authenticity of your faith, whether your profession is fake or pseudo or it's legitimately a supernatural work of God.

And if you start failing the test and compromising, you're on the high road to apostasy. There are not a few gentlemen who have either openly renounced faith or departed from it in their hearts. While carrying on public ministry, I'm sorry, but I'm not enamored with platform personalities.

Brother Paul, I work closely with, he hates a three-wing circus and he would much rather sit around a table with a dozen missionaries and dialogue about the things of God than to go to Eastern Europe and preach to a crowd of four or five thousand. And that's no promotion. If the word gets out, everybody shows up.

I'm not saying, God, don't use some men. And I'm not saying that all these men are not the real deal. Some of them are the real deal.

But I'll tell you, friend, some I've been with. And what's going on behind the scenes is not what's being promoted on the platform. And I will sit there to censor.

I'm no man's policeman. But friend, some of these things are so glaring and so obvious, it's appalling. And here's the thing.

You may not be a platform speaker, but don't think for a minute that what I'm talking to you tonight about and warning you of can't happen to you. Prone to wonder? Yes, Lord, I feel it. But prone to leave a God I love? I have no concept of that.

Christ has purchased me. I've gotten a good drink of His love. The thought of abandoning Him doesn't exist in my mind.

But I still know my flesh. And if I start making compromises and moving down the road to compromise, I'm no better than anybody else. I could deny my Lord if I compromise my conscience and character.

So take heed or guard your character from neglect. Maintain, gentlemen, a close watch over the real you. Because when character is compromised and becomes corrupt, take radical measures to cleanse your conscience and character from all filthiness of the flesh.

Listen to me. Think about it. Deal ruthlessly with any sinful indulgence.

Ruthlessly. I'm careful about my choice of words. Ruthlessly.

Take no prisoners. But be willing to pluck out eyes and cut off hands by faith to avoid being cast into hell. For in so doing, from our text tonight, you will save yourself and those who hear you.

But above all else, let us remember the words of Paul to Timothy here in 1 Timothy 4 verse 8 that says, Godliness or godly character is profitable for all things, having the promise of this life now with all the blessing and benefits, but also the world, the eternal world become. This is what I close with. I want to share with you a fitting illustration from the writings of a man that I highly respect.

And although he is deceased, it is resounding. He speaks with a resounding edge. Many of you have heard of him before.

His name was Conrad Murrell. In one of his articles in his periodic magazine called Gateposts, he draws from the story found in First Kings chapter 13 of an old prophet who advises a young prophet to come back in the city when God's told the young prophet that he is to go another way. He's not to tarry.

He's to move quickly after he's delivered a prophetic word. So the old prophet beckons him and said, thus says the Lord. And he's assuming that this man is speaking on the behalf of God.

Perhaps maybe God has changed his mind. So he goes home with him. You remember the story of how ultimately he's killed by a lion.

The young prophet heeds the wishes of the old prophet and it costs him dearly. That's interesting. Conrad Murrell proceeded to mention eight notable preachers in this article from a previous generation who had wonderful ministries, but because of a compromise of, listen, of character, they drifted away from the faith, or at least they did not finish well.

I'm going to only mention three, not names, but perhaps some of you may recognize them. Mr. Murrell said this, it has come to my notice in recent days that a man may have a profoundly rich and fruitful ministry most of his life, and then in his latter years do say, write, or embrace something that is almost, if not actually brings a disgrace upon the name of the Lord and cast a shadow on his entire ministry. Example number one, this man was a Scotsman, converted to Christ in his youth and became a devoted and flaming evangelist.

His ministry included some marvelous revivals in Eastern Europe, a number of which countries now are locked up behind the Iron Curtain. That's when he wrote this article that existed, the Iron Curtain. But Mr. Murrell says this man is the author of scores of inspirational books, biographies, and booklets centering around true evangelism, revival, and the Holy Spirit.

His entire ministry was characterized by joyous victory. Yet, Conrad says, in the last few years of his life, he became a cringing, whining picture of defeat. He was convinced that the Lord had abandoned him, feared the company of people, and was in a constant state of depression.

Example number two, this is astounding. A prolific writer of great stature, who, as is so often the case, was not fully appreciated until his decease. He wrote some of the best books and commentaries from the Reformed viewpoint of the century.

As he grew older, he became increasingly bitter and intolerant of those who held views contrary to his own. Before he died, he was known to have a serious drinking problem. Fortunately, because he was in an isolated part of the world, he was not accepted as he is today.

His latter year's deterioration was not widely known. Example number three, here's another man, a powerful evangelist from the old country. His star has faded.

His type of preaching, which once stirred thousands, is no longer heard seriously. Even though his preaching ministry is for all practical purposes finished, he is still in demand as a novelty or as a drawing feature in conferences and in some churches. He is lonely in his rejection, sick and disillusioned over the apostasy of churches.

Listen now, he has been associated with a number of evangelical associations. Dissenters soon are drawn to him through his powerful influence and strong denunciations. Often splits occur afterwards in those churches or denominations because of his influence.

He continues to attract malcontents and soreheads who mistakenly associate his severe denunciations with their own hatreds and prejudices. In such a way, he in turn mistakenly identifies their hatreds and prejudices with his own holy indignation at the apostasy of churches and evangelism. He said, and in such a way, he strengthens the hand of the wicked in their uprising and rebellion against their spiritual leaders.

Now, some of these men that Brother Murrow mentions, they border on apostasy, but none of the eight finished well. I don't want to be that way. I don't want to be known in the latter years of my life of being a cynical, bitter old man.

I really, brothers, have purposed in my heart to leave a legacy of love. Because once again, if bitterness festers and continues in one's life, a root of bitterness can lead to apostasy, once again, just like a continuation of immorality. So I encourage you tonight, take heed to your character.

Don't ever think that you're too old or too mature or too well-advanced spiritually for a message of this nature. Because I reiterate again, brothers, this could happen to you. Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that you might take this truth that we've looked at tonight. Well, Father, may this portion of Scripture from 1 Timothy, particularly verse 16 of chapter 4, engender such conviction in our hearts, Lord, that we would determine not to draw back in unbelief, but continue to believe, to keep on believing unto the saving of the soul. Father, save us from ourselves.

So easy in this day and age where all these bells and whistles and trinkets and things, Lord, that vie for our attention. It's so easy to give heed to those things. And then suddenly our conscience is weakened and our heart begins to grow cold toward the things of God.

Please, God, protect us. Preserve your people. To the praise of the glory of your grace, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, brothers, maybe for 15 more minutes, if anyone has any questions or follow-up thoughts, I was wondering, Don, if maybe there's more specific examples you could give of what you mentioned, people beating the air. What are subtle ways people are actually doing that they don't even recognize, that that's actually taking place? They think they're actually hitting something, but they're not.

I don't know if there's something that comes to your mind, something more you could share on that one. Well, great question, James. I think that I use social justice as an example.

There's so many things these days, people arguing over complementarianism versus egalitarianism. There are theological things that are coming up that are very minor compared to the major doctrines of the faith that they camp out on. Some people get absorbed with apologetics, and it's all about defending the faith or arguing the faith with other people.

I was taken from a church in Louisiana to the airport early one morning by the pastor, and he said that when he was at Wheaton, his responsibility was to pick up the conference speakers or the chapel speakers at the airport, take them, let them speak. Sometimes they'd stay for a few days, sometimes it was just one service, and then he would take them back. One day, he had one of the leading apologists in our country in the car with him.

They were talking, and he was telling this apologist, he said, there's a certain apologist that I know you know him. The guy said, yeah, I do. He said, well, I really think a lot of his ministry, I love to see the way he articulates things and he can argue the faith.

He said, what do you think of him? The guy just kind of dropped his head, and he said, well, let me just say this. He argues the faith better than he lives it. I mean, there's something to Paul's words to keep in mind the gospel, lest you believe in vain.

So that's the thing we've got to keep foremost in our mind, and it should have no close rivals. So maybe that would serve as a few examples there. Yes, brother.

It's sad and discouraging of these powerful leaders that prayed for so many years and then fell, but many were saved under their preaching. And I'm just pondering about these people and be disappointed and discouraged about how they were saved, but the Lord did the work, I'm sure it was very good. Well, brother, we never underestimate the power of the word.

God can take even an unregenerate man who articulates well and speaks the truth, to use that truth in spite of his character to still save people. So, yeah, it's alarming to me. It's disturbing, brother.

Most unsettling thing. I mean, people that I was close to today. Yes, brother.

So my question is kind of a question and kind of a comment. So I'll make a comment and I'll let you clarify if I understand correctly. In regard to distractions concerning the gospel, you made a comment, I see an

illustration of Paul Usher and someone had said, when are you going to comment on social justice? And he said, I'm not going to.

You don't either. So I want to make sure I understand that we're saying that the distraction is not only in being, whether you stand here or there on that issue, but rather the distraction is engaging in itself when the gospel is the priority. Is that what you're saying? No matter left or right, in the middle, whatever it is, it's a distraction.

Yeah. And to every man, every minister, he stands or falls. So there are churches like our church, my co-elder and I, we had Jeffrey Johnson come in and do a four-part series on social justice.

So it doesn't mean that we should not expose people to the teaching to understand the nature of it, what it's doing to people as well as the body of Christ. But in Paul's situation, because of his reputation and people are looking to heart cry as a gospel-centered ministry, he had no liberty to address that publicly. Because he said, in our case, it's going to be a major distraction to us in continuing to promote the gospel.

So yeah, I'm not saying it was wrong across the board. There's some people that preach on it, but to become absorbed with it, it can be a dangerous thing. Yes, brother.

I have four. That's a great question. I'm going to really be practical, okay.

Go to bed when you put them to bed. That way you can get up early before they get up and spend time alone with Christ. And once again, the thing is, when you hear a message like this, and like the other night, a sister came to me, she had a little baby in her arms, and she really appreciated this message on just communing with Christ and spending time with Him.

And I said, sister, don't let the devil take something that God spoke to you about and put you in bondage, saying, well, man, I need to get up and spend an hour, hour and a half alone with the Lord. No, it may be only five minutes at this time of your life. But just honor God.

If it's just five minutes of communion with Him, get up before Him and just worship Him. Or you might even do it when the baby's asleep in your arms. But this is the thing.

I mean, we hear a message like this, and we say, man, I'm going to really short my act. And we go through extreme. First thing you know, we're in bondage.

So yeah, but I would really recommend that. I mean, obviously, if you put the kids to bed at 830 at night, if you went to bed, if you disciplined your life to go to bed at 930, you could pretty much get up at 4 or 430 and spend that first hour or so before you get ready to go to work with the Lord. And this is my age.

This is what I'm doing right now. I just started back months ago. I'm going to the gym.

I hired a trainer. So I'm 69 years of age, and he's got me on three days. And then I just start over again of all these machines, lifting weights, treadmill, elliptical machine, strengthen the cardiovascular.

It's making the biggest difference in my spiritual disciplines of secret prayer and meditation and just contemplating the Word of God and worshiping Christ and seeing Christ in the scriptures. It's making such a difference. So it takes about, I know a lot of you men don't have this, but it takes me about three, three and a half hours a day to do those disciplines physically and spiritually.

But I'm telling you, it's made all the difference in the world of my life. So, yeah. Thank you for the question.

Great question. Yes. Continuing on that idea of bondage, I would believe it could also be very synonymous with the idea of discouragement because indeed seeing the good in adopting those disciplines of sitting there for an hour and being alone with the Lord, but yet also seeing how incapable or unwilling they are or individuals may be to actually conduct that.

And then just seeing that discouragement could only just drive them further into that spiral. What would be some key things that one could take away from such situations so as not to be discouraged? Well, the big thing is there are mornings when it's like the heavens are open, where I really sense God growing near and I'm helped as I read the scripture. I mean, it's riveted in my heart.

I mean, I'm seeing things. There are many times when I see nothing. I find myself rereading my systematic Bible reading.

I've just read a few verses and I said, I'm not even paying attention. My mind is easily going away. So I reread it.

So the thing is you stay the course, even though it may not be as savory this morning as it is other mornings. But I would say in all those disciplines, I just continue to stay the course. Whether I am fulfilled or not, in my conscience, I know I'm pleasing God in fulfilling those disciplines.

Does that come close? It's not exactly pursuing the satisfaction, but rather the, maybe not even the discipline, but just like indeed continuing on in the practice to indeed honor God. And even though we may not, much like, if I'm going to understand it, even though it says we may not always feel the burden is light, as Christ has said, but discipline brings us shortly. That's right.

Yeah. Because the thing is, that's another part of fighting in faith. Even if I don't feel, I don't feel like I'm connected with the Lord that morning.

I don't feel like I've gotten the ultimate out of my devotional time. I still stay the course. I fight the good fight of faith, which the implication of that is I've resolved to still read the scripture and still pray, even though I don't have that stirring and that joy and that expectation that I had in other times.

And God honors that, brother. Because even that is an act of faith, is I still stay the course. That's an act of faith.

I suppose in continuation with that one last question, I suppose then in that light, being unjoyous or not feeling that joy is not a sin, though we are indeed commanded to bear fruits, bear witnesses, love, joy, peace, and praise the Lord. Yeah, you know, you read these quotes like George Miller, you know, that the first aim of his day was to get his soul happy in God. Well, you got to be careful because there are days I don't get my soul happy in God.

Or you read Andrew Murray, who said the purpose of devotion is to secure the presence of God for the day. Well, I have to believe that I have secured the presence of God by the fact that I've obeyed God, even though I don't feel like I've secured the presence of God for the day. And so, yeah, God honors our stick-to-it-ness in spite of the fact that we have no feeling or story or emotion.

Yeah. Yeah. Being in the military, being in the Navy, it's not spiritual, but you're disciplined.

Yeah. You're born to do this, to do that, not to do that, you know. And it's been a long time.

But recently, I saw the commander of the SEALs giving a speech to a graduating class, and he said that you really put a lot of emphasis, impact. The first thing in the morning, make your bed, make it properly. And you know that since then, I've made it a point to make my bed regardless of what—I make time to make my bed every morning, you know.

Yeah. Just try to make it simple, commended, maybe smooth, and just a little bit like this. It's not spiritual, but it's disciplined.

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, brother. That's a great illustration.

We're in a heart cry right now. I tune in. I'm one of the guys that Zooms in every Monday through Friday.

We have a seven o'clock prayer meeting in the morning, so we'll pray like 45 minutes to an hour. And our minion evangelist friend of mine said, he'll tell me sometime when he comes back from the church meeting, he said, brother, I'll tell you, we were involved in a red hot prayer meeting. The urgency, the fervency, the agony, the crying out to God, the expectation, it was just incredible.

Well, our heart cry prayer meetings many times are red hot. I mean, there's wailing, there's weeping, asking God to do something for our donors to help them or help our missionaries. We've got a number of missionaries right now whose lives are at risk, like in Miramar and other places.

And so we're crying out to God. And I'll tell you, you can sense God drawing near. But sometimes it's just ordinary, where there's no emotion involved or anything.

But the bottom line is God is still pleased. Yeah. Yeah.

I just wanted to clarify something I heard. I never heard the phrase used that you mentioned, the grace of discretion. That caught my attention.

But I think as you were explaining it, you mentioned that like we have the grace of discerning where not to go, where to go, what decisions to take and things like that. Is that what you're meaning by that? Well, I think they're two entirely different words. Discernment is knowing what I should do, what I shouldn't do.

Whereas discretion is foreseeing the danger, whether it's with my lips, what I'm saying or where I'm trafficking. And I avoid that. You know, the proverb says that the wise man, the prudent man, he foresees the danger and avoids it.

So I know my capability at times. When I'm traveling, I can be very vulnerable to people raising questions that's going to engender a reaction of criticism. So what I'm doing is I'm warning them as well as myself, the beginning of our conversation, when sometimes in prayer, let's not talk about anything, or I'll pray, Lord, please, I pray that no issue would be raised that would engender a critical spirit.

So to me, that's discretion. You're foreseeing, you know, your capability and your tendency toward something that displeases God. Does that make sense? Yeah.

Thanks for the question. That's good. Do you think that the beliefs of, you know, once saved, always saved, versus, you know, being able to lose salvation and gain it again, can be more of an encouragement to a brother, or more of a like a springboard towards like deconstruction? Yeah.

Well, here's what I tell him very simply. I just say, I don't believe in once saved, always saved. I believe if saved, always saved.

And, you know, that shouldn't discourage somebody. Hopefully, that would encourage them. That if I'm in Christ, my life is changing.

I'm undergoing a change that's not my own. It's something that is nothing short of supernatural. Yeah.

Thank you. If this is tangential, then you'll forgive me. But I just can't resist the opportunity to ask someone of your wisdom and experience about this particular issue.

But feel free to say, we'll talk. We'll talk afterwards, brother. You don't want to give this too much airtime.

But men like A.W. Tozer, and I believe the sentiments are echoed by Richard Owen Roberts, that the manifest presence of God at some point in the 50s or 60s, pinpoints it, makes an assertion, it departed from the American church. Do you think that there's any credibility to an assertion like that? Or is that just overly subjective? Or what are your thoughts on that idea? I'll just say I couldn't do that. I couldn't say that.

Because God's doing a work in some churches across the land, that I mean, the glory of God permeates the place. It's real, there's reality there. So I can't make a blanket statement like that.

I think that just shows, shows me once again, that the best of men are meant at best. And as much as I love Tozer, and as much as I love Richard Owen Roberts, I couldn't make that statement with a good conscience. Yes, sir.

Yeah, yeah. This is what one priest said, we ought to always preach and testify in such a way that affords the potential of faith in people. You make radical statements, or if they're biblical, yeah, we have the liberty of making them.

But when we start speculating, or putting our philosophy or our bent into a statement, then what we do is we breed unbelief and despair in people. And I want to give them every reason in the world to believe that God could still rend the heavens and come down. Yeah.

To clarify, I do not hold that position. Malcontents gravitate to that, and then they say, because a man of the stature such as Tozer and Richard Owen Roberts says that, I therefore justify to becoming a malcontent, kind of isolating on this island of all see the church in America is bad. Therefore, we have a justification to withdraw from her and even badmouth the bride of Christ.

Yeah, they think that's what's happened. Yeah, I'm glad you clarified because I saw some of the bread and passing out rocks in the back. Yes, brother.

How can you be such a good expositor, but yet not leave out what you're preaching in a sense? And somebody else who seems to not, this is my person to you, who seems not as a great preacher on paper. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think I better understand what you're saying.

You know, someone asked J.I. Packer one time, who, in your opinion, is the greatest preacher in the world? And he said, you don't know him. He's out in some little remote village somewhere, pastoring a dozen people. But he said, you're talking about a rich expositor.

You don't want a man that walks with God and has a profound prayer life. He said he's the greatest preacher in the world. So where I'm at personally, is I hate cerebral Calvinism.

I mean, our exposition should always be a means to an end. And that is to know a felt Christ. I'm pursuing a felt Christ.

So I gravitate to the little guys, you know, that you can tell they're full of reality. They don't have all the answers theologically, but they love Christ. And they love the Word of God.

And they're students of the Word of God. They study. But yet, man, first and foremost, they love Jesus.

Yeah. So, yeah, I'm not cast out the other guys. I mean, I appreciate them and love them.

But I just know what a heavy input of cerebral does to me without taking that and using it as a springboard to pursue Christ. It's a breeding ground for pride. Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you, brother. Thank you.

Anybody else? Yes, sir, brother. We know that there's sin. There's always been sin.

But in recent years, new lifestyles have been introduced into our society. And we're compelled, we're not compelled, encouraged to accept these lifestyles, which are sinful and wicked. Of course, the Romans 14 says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the new man of your mind.

And so we're living in this society. And this is a battle against the truth, against sin. And certainly there's much around us.

The newspapers are new. You see it all around, you know, lifestyles that are wicked, sinful. And we have to live in the middle of all this.

Of course, our lives need to reflect that goodness and mercy of God. Yes. Yes, brother.

Gentlemen, pray for me. This is my purpose statement these days. I don't want to take any more ministry.

And my wife and I, we're busy. I mean, we could be out every week if we wanted to be. But I'm having to regulate my schedule.

And determine do this yourself. Don't take any more in your life than your devotional life can accommodate. I mean, if you're not much with God alone in secret prayer, and worship, don't take on more ministry or don't take on more a second job or whatever.

But you'll know in your conscience, if I've overextended myself to the neglect of my family or neglect of the Lord, but don't take any more in your life than what your devotional life will accommodate. Because once again, one of the benefits of that is the preservation of your soul. Somebody else have their hand up back here? Yes, brother.

I just answered a little bit where I'm just, I mean, it's like, it's a waste of breath to ask, how do we even balance this world and the news? Like, it's just saying, it's like, there's so much there. It's so opposite of what the church is and who Christ is. It's like there's a tendency to just push it all aside.

Well, what good is that? When you're not even teaching your kids that. I mean, the current events of the day, how do I balance that? And then at the same time, not just be dwelling there, because I'm very capable of dwelling there. But you just said not taking more than what your devotional life is able to accommodate.

You remember Jesus said to Martha, one thing is needful, not soul winning, not missions, not separation of the world. It's worship. And in my time alone with God, if I fight for it to be savory, where I really strive to meet with Christ, whether I do or not, God's pleased, I have no problem being salt and light and speaking truth before my enemies.

But the thing that worship affords is I speak truth. That's always counseling, great love and compassion, and they can sense it. They can't get angry at me when I just share truth with them.

But it all comes, it goes back to my devotional life. So to me, everybody wants a list. That tends toward moralism.

So give me 10 steps on how to be more sanctified or 10 steps on how to be. Now listen, one thing is needful. If the worship, the walk with God and worship is intact, may not be as great as we want it with joy, the emotion, but yet I'm obeying God.

It's amazing. I mean, it's like Paul says often, Paul Washer, God delights in vindicating the confidence of his children. He will always do it if I'm seeking him first.

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