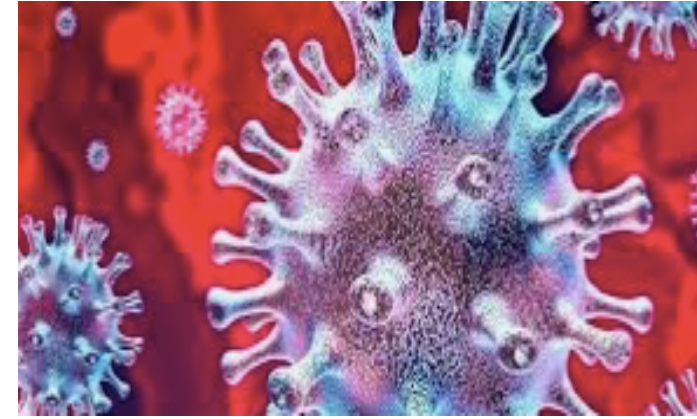


2 Peter 1:6
Hope in the fight

Godly control!

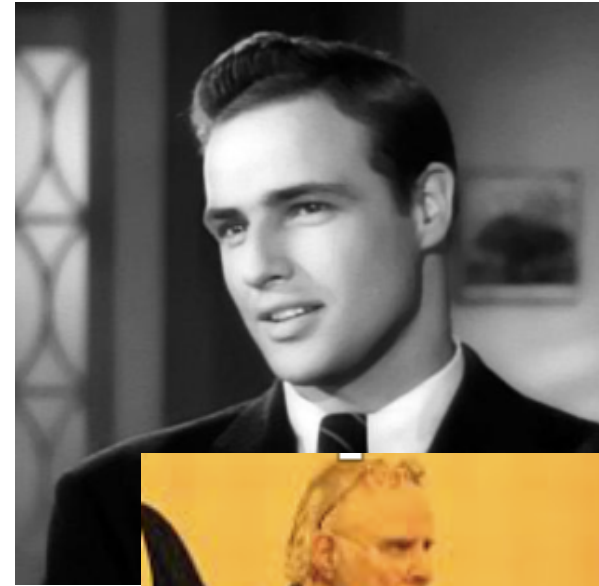


Control is a god-like power. There is so much in our lives that is out of our control. We can't control our own health. We can try to. This whole COVID-19 pandemic is an exercise in a desperate human attempt to control what almost certainly cannot be controlled. We make vaccines, but the virus keeps mutating, just like the flu, so we race to make a new vaccine for next year. It is something which is not going away. It is going to become a part of our life from now on, just like colds and flu! We just have to adjust our minds and our way of life to fit this new reality! Hopefully we will come up with increasingly effective anti-viral drugs that will help us to survive a COVID infection when we get one. And it is not a matter of *if* we get infected, but *when*! If we were in control, we would just issue an order for it to go away, and it would. God could do that if He decided to, but He hasn't. Somehow this fits within His plan. I'm not saying He made this happen, or that it is His judgment upon the earth and this nation, but He puts everything that happens to good use in His ultimate plan. But here we are, stuck with this yucky, frightening new problem, and terribly frustrated that, despite doing all we can do to slow its spread, we do not have the ability to make it go away!



Then it is frustrating that we can not longer get some of the merchandise that we have always been able to buy off the selves. Recently we needed a garage door, but Menards did not have any of the kind of door we wanted in stock. We had to order it and wait about **3 months** for it to be built and to arrive. I think they had to start from scratch – like going out and mining the metal ore for it! We go to Walmart and find some of the strangest gaps on the shelves and in the coolers where they simply are out of inventory! At Costco this weekend, **THEY DIDN'T HAVE CHILI POWDER!!** My daughter-in-law, Sonja, then mentioned that she recently went to the store searching for chili powder, and her store in Minneapolis was all out of chili powder also! What a strange gap in our grocery inventory! We seemed to have so much control before this virus hit, and now more and more things are spinning out of control! Right now, gas prices are spinning out of control. This hurts our household's bottom line, with no end in sight! More and more of our money is flying out of our wallets at a faster rate and it makes us frustrated and angry. Who can we blame! I have an idea on that. Most people do! But it it is²just another thing that seems to be totally out of our control. It is maddening!

And then we come to the issue of control over ourselves! Perhaps that is the hardest and most frustrating control issue in our lives. Most of us over the age of 40 are overweight. We have the protruding bellies and fleshier faces to prove it. None of us wants that, yet few people ever make a real and prolonged and successful effort to stop our outward expansion after a certain age. It makes it harder for us to get around, to do the things we used to do, to be comfortable in our own skin. But to take control and bring our weight back down would require that we stop eating as much – that we eat foods that are better for us – that we experience hunger pangs and **do not** go to the refrigerator immediately to assuage them. How frustrating it is to not be in control of ourselves! Those who find they **can** control their eating, go overboard and start eating **nothing** and develop a mental and physical condition called bulimia or worse, anorexia, where a person can finally control something in their life, what they allow into their body. But then they cannot control their control and literally starve themselves to death or completely ruin their health at a young age! Many young people are addicted to internet pornography, and experience the shame and inner darkness from indulging in it. Yet when they try to stop, they cannot, and their shame and desperation deepens! It is not just young people that struggle with this. Older people do too – people with a life-long problem! It is really a sad and pathetic phenomenon! Minds polluted and poisoned and held apart from God simply because they cannot control themselves! At Eden we wanted to take control from God, and in the process, we **lost** control!



The earth is full of lost control! But here we are are told that we must add to our goodness and our knowledge, the attribute of **self-control**. This is the hardest thing for us! That means we have to control, for instance, our temper. That means we must contain our rage and fury! Who can do that? When we fly off the handle who can say they are in their right mind and in control of themselves? But when Peter calls the Christ-follower to self-control it means that we must control our appetite for food, or material possessions, or sex, or power, or ease! bring under our power those things that tempt us with over-indulgence, and even with obsession! None of these things are morally bad in themselves. However, they all become vices if they are allowed to careen out of control - if we let our natural appetites take over and rule us instead of us ruling them, our appetites become **pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony or sloth (laziness) – the “seven deadly sins”**. Each area can enslave us, separate us from fellowship with God, and then shame us! We cannot represent God very well to a world that desperately needs Him if we are enslaved by any one or more of our appetites! Our appetites can take us to a very dark place, and God will not follow us there. Only through heartfelt confession and repentance can we turn it around. But God does not do it all. He doesn't touch us with His magic wand and "poof" our vices go away. Well, that doesn't happen most of the time anyway. Sometimes it DOES happen. But the vast majority of the time it doesn't and we are still stuck with something which has become the sin of overindulgence in our lives, a sad, demanding, and demeaning preoccupation with some variety of sin! So God will give us His Spirit to come alongside and support our repentance and our desire to live and serve God in freedom! He will support our attempts at self-control if we are serious about it because He knows that we will do only what we really want to do! What we choose is what we really want. So, if we love HIM more than our sin, we will be powered by God, the Holy Spirit, to overcome it!

**SPIRITUAL
POWER**



“...and to self-control, perseverance...”

This is about counting the cost so you can finish. *Perseverance* is about staying on your journey, sticking to the path, so that you can finish as well as possible. [Deut. 5:32]. *Marriage – you have to count the cost before you take the plunge. You will gain much in most cases, but you will lose much also. Family ties are expanded because you don't just marry an individual, you marry a family. You must know before you say “*I do*” that you will have less time for your own family. Hopefully you like your spouse's family, but even if you don't care for them so much, you are duty bound to spend holidays with them - to share time with her side as she must spend time with your side of the family. You also lose your independence. You can no longer do whatever pops into your head to do as a single person. You have to consider your spouse. You will probably lose many of your old friends. It is hard-to-impossible to remain as close friends with those who were previously your close friends before you are married. Sometimes that will survive, but infrequently! Certainly all friends of the **opposite sex** are cut off. You don't call, write, or text them. They are gone,.. cast out! You also have to consult with each other about expenditures. The days when you just decided to buy something you just wanted are over! You have to talk it over and literally get your spouse's permission! But if you truly love your fiancé, or your husband or wife, it is worth it, because you have them! You've made a good trade! [Luke 14:] – Likewise, when you give your heart to Jesus, it better be a decision where you have counted the cost first! If you answer the call to follow Him, you will have to learn to stand alone when you are out there in the world. If you go public with your status as a Bible-believing Christian, you will face ridicule, rejection, and even shaming by many out there. They will look for your weaknesses and try to exploit them so that they can score social points off of your humiliation. You will lose friends and even fellowship with some of your family members. Even if you manage to maintain civil or even friendly relations, you will never again fit in to their lifestyle. You will be limited in your language. You cannot say anything you want to say or use any word you want to use! You will have to speak only truth. But the other side of the coin is that you will have Jesus! He has given you an increasing sense of freedom, and He has expanded your tiny, insignificant, misspent life with true meaning and significance! He has taken you from being angry, and frustrated, and suspicious, and cynical, and impatient with others, and from a self-centered world view. to being fulfilled, and purposeful, and content, and to living a life of love, and to being outwardly focused rather than inwardly focused.



Outwardly focused people see the world through the eyes of God. They see its needs, they step in as peacemakers because unity is more important than hammering others with their own view points. The only opinion that is really worth causing disunity over is your opinion of the Lord Jesus Christ. He predicted that it would cause conflict, but that is the one thing we are to cause disunity over. We don't argue over politics – not worth it – unless someone is genuinely asking about and open to our perspective. Otherwise it just divides, and that is ultimately counter-productive to the expansion of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is not about making enemies, but cultivating friendships with people who don't share our belief system! We don't argue over how to deal with the COVID threat –not worth it and totally counter productive. No one is going to persuade anyone to change their viewpoint and their approach. So it is something we must decide to keep our mouths shut on because that is the best way to preserve unity and unity is of the Holy Spirit!

Peacemaking is His objective in us! It is one of His miracles to help us behave in ways contrary to our natures. It is His perspective that our lives are not our own any longer. Our lives were purchased for God when He gave His life for us – ***“You are not your own. You have been bought at a price”***. The price, of course, was His infinitely precious life!

Well, anyway,.. These are, currently, the most difficult aspects of the Christian life to persevere in – politics and our personal response to the COVID! Our temptation is always to step out of the perimeters the Holy Spirit has set up for us, and to start rolling down the hill like a locomotive without brakes! Whenever we get our back up and start causing problems among people, we are on our own and living according to our base nature! We have rejected the will of God, and have gone our own way, and have become a destructive force in the Kingdom of God! That is a bad place! **People are either jumping onto the unity bus or jumping off of it these days!** These last, sadly, become spoilers within the church! They throw away all they have learned to vent their opinions. Don't do it! Our circumstances have changed but not what we are charged with! So ***nothing*** has changed! Persevere in the good! **Gal. 6:9** ***“Let us not become weary in doing good...”***

[Deut. 20:1-8] ***“If any of you are afraid, go home, or you will dishearten the rest of us”***

