

Applying Scripture to Life

Topic 4 – Spiritual Growth

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Review / Introduction

God gives believers the resources necessary to address every life issue in a way that honors Him. The Scriptures are clear that all believers (those who have exercised the gift of true saving faith) are **commanded** and **capable** to use the Scriptures in the power of the Holy Spirit to make disciples; to address their own and others' life issues and sin.

The purpose of this series is to equip each of us so that through the sufficiency of Christ and the Scriptures we can mature, grow in our ability to apply the Scriptures to our own life issues and sin, and also bring Biblical care to one another.

We are now studying some aspects of practical theology that are particularly applicable to our purpose. We have looked at sin and its insidiousness and its impact on ourselves and most importantly the negative impact on our relationship with God. We looked at the amazing work that God does in our life at the moment of salvation. The believer has been freed from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and one day in heaven from the very presence of sin by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Yet now our labor is to battle the flesh and remain in constant fellowship with Christ with the resources God has given us. Should we sin, confession to God and repentance from sin are our remedies.

We looked at the Spirit's filling ministry. The usual, expected position of the believer is to be filled with (or controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18-6:9). The believer who is bowed only before God and not other masters (of sin) is filled with the Spirit. When a believer is submitted to God and his Word, the indwelling Holy Spirit produces Christ-like heart motives, attitudes, words, reactions, and relationships. The remedy for walking in the flesh (i.e., sinning) is not self-effort. It is Spirit-filling. It is walking in the Spirit. The Spirit enables a life that is in accord with God's word.

Walking in the Spirit is a moment-by-moment decision to recognize, repent, and confess sin (not grieving the Spirit – Eph 4:30); yield your will to God's moral will as set forth in His word (not quenching the Spirit – 1 Thess 5:19-20); and allow the word to richly dwell within you (Col 3:16). We are filled with the Spirit for power to live in a way that is honoring to God, and we can discern clearly either negatively (Gal 5:19-21) or positively (Gal 5:22-23) if we are filled or not.

The Spirit applies the Word to the believer's heart. The Spirit is powerful. God's Word is powerful. Therefore, the believer in the most dire, seemingly hopeless circumstances can be encouraged, comforted, and changed as the Spirit applies the Word to his/her heart. One of the results of Spirit filling is progressive sanctification, being progressively transformed into Christ's image (2 Cor 3:18). The outside will be moving to match-up with the inside exhibiting progressively more Christ-like character.

Today we look at spiritual growth or progressive sanctification.

Objective Truth and Subjective Evidence

The assurance of salvation involves two aspects: objective truth and subjective evidence. Both objective truth and subjective evidence go hand-in-hand.

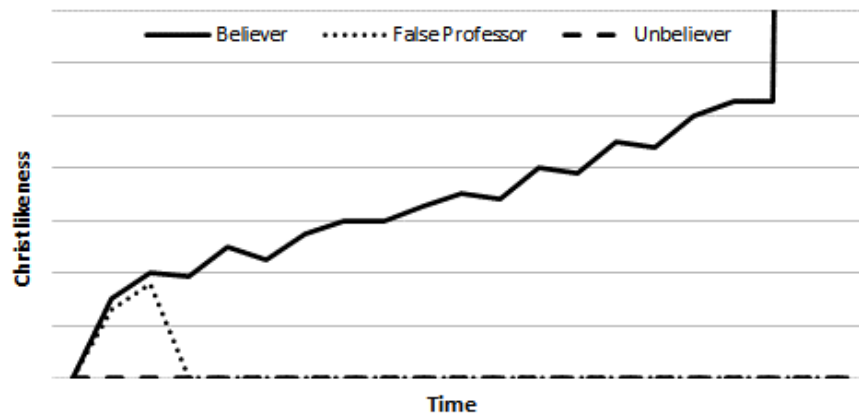
The objective basis of assurance is the finished work of Christ and His promise to those who exercise true saving faith. John's inspired writings give a plethora of objective truths (John 3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:1).

⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. (John 6:47)

The Scriptures are clear that true salvation is accompanied by a changed life. Those who are truly saved will be progressing in sanctification because of God's work in their life and because they are striving in the power of Spirit to glorify God and grow in their relationship with Christ. True believers will have a desire to know their Redeemer more and more.

The subjective evidence for assurance is progressive sanctification and includes the witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16; 1 John 3:24), fellowship with God's people (1 John 1:3), walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7), hatred and confession of one's own sin (1 John 1:5-2:2), walking in obedience (1 John 2:5; 3:5-6), walking like Christ (1 John 2:6), not loving the world (1 John 2:15), purity (1 John 3:3), love (1 John 3:14; 18-19), overcoming the world (1 John 5:4), etc. A profession of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation is self-deception.

There are three paths that people are on as shown here.



The unbeliever has no significant changes in their life. There may be moments of “self-improvement” but no heart-level sanctification.

The false professor (one who claims to have believed in Christ but is either externally or internally deceived) starts with a connection to the body and things of Christ, but ultimately falls away and either actively or passively denies Christ. There may be moments of “self-improvement” but no heart-level sanctification.

The believer (one who has exercised true saving faith, surrendered their life to Christ) often demonstrates significant changes at or around salvation then a continued upward trend of progressive sanctification throughout their life, culminating in glory.

❖ Which best describes you?

All Scripture are from the NASB '95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

A caution is warranted. Subjective evidences are present as a result of walking in the Spirit. We must be careful to ensure that subjective evidences are not legalism.

³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal 3:3)

Spiritual Growth (Progressive Sanctification)

One of the results of Spirit filling is spiritual growth or progressive sanctification, being progressively transformed into Christ's image (2 Cor 3:18). Spiritual growth is progressively having your character, motives, thoughts, words, and deeds match up with your position in Christ.

If you have surrendered your life to Christ, you have an amazing promise regarding your spiritual growth. But you also have a solemn responsibility.

God causes growth (progressively sanctifies), but He causes growth as you "cooperate" with Him. God does His part, and you do your part. The accompanying truth of God's sanctifying work is that we are commanded to strive and work hard at that growth and by doing so display the subjective evidences of salvation.

⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 1:6)

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;** ¹¹for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Pet 1:10-11)

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is **God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** (Phil 2:12-13)

This striving, pressing on to be like Christ is for all believers – young in the Lord, old in the Lord, mature, or less mature. Look what Paul says in Philippians.

¹²Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but **I press** on so that I may **lay hold of** that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,** ¹⁴**I press on** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:12-14)

❖ Are you striving, pressing, reaching?

What is involved in the striving, pressing, and reaching? Obviously, the Bible is a significant part of that. But as we will see later, we can say more generally that a vibrant relationship with God more encompassing.

²**like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,** (1 Pet 2:2)

Training, practice, and discipline are also a part.

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But **solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.** (Heb 5:11-14)

⁷ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, **discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;** ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come. (1 Tim 4:7-8)

And the body of Christ plays a part.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and **let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,** ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another;** and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25)

❖ **How are you doing in your training regimen?**

Putting Off and Putting On

The growth process, maturing, also involves putting off sin and putting on righteousness. Biblical methods of turning from sin involve yielding to the Holy Spirit; submission to the Word of God; and putting off sin, renewing the mind, and putting on righteousness.

²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self,** which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind,** ²⁴ and **put on the new self,** which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph 4:20-24)

Paul spends the first 3 chapters of Ephesians detailing the blessings of salvation. Then in chapter 4, because of that salvation, believers are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”. Do not be like you were before, be something different. This process of change or sanctification (changing into Christ-likeness) is described as: 1) put off, 2) renew, and 3) put on.

“Lay aside” (“put off” in the ESV) means to cease doing what you were previously accustomed to doing; stop doing it; throw it off like filthy, foul-smelling clothes; be done with it. It is a metaphor like having your clothes soaked with sewage and stripping them off and throwing them away and never getting them back. Like repentance from sin – we strip the sin off and never get it back.

❖ **Do you throw off sin with the intent to never pick it up again?**

Putting off presupposes something. Just like in the context in Ephesians, there is a known sin that is desiring to be laid aside. This requires that we actually know what sin is, which we find in the Bible. It also requires that God is showing us our sin.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psa 139:23-24)

¹Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, And I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. ²Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart. (Psa 26:1-2)

❖ Is this your prayer?

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” – our minds are made new as we fill it with the word of God. It is not about covering up sin with something that smells good. It is about being transformed so that the sin is no longer a part of you. God’s Word is the tool that God’s Spirit uses to produce God honoring change in God’s child. Let’s look at other places where the author uses the put off sin, be renewed, and put on righteousness pattern.

¹Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ²And **do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may **prove what the will of God is**, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2)

¹Therefore, **putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander**, ²like newborn babies, **long for the pure milk of the word**, so that **by it you may grow in respect to salvation**, ³if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Pet 2:1-3)

⁶**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

So, we see that the “renewing” part of this process has to do with a dynamic, intimate relationship with God through the word and prayer.

❖ Are you striving in that relationship?

“Put on the new self” – Paul continues his clothing metaphor. The idea is "sinking into a garment". It is like sinking into a new coat when it is freezing outside. This is making a choice to obey, to do righteousness, to replace the sin that you “put off” with obedience.

❖ Is your purpose to glorify God through obedience?

Worry/Anxiousness Example

“Put off”

Worry has been called misplaced, ungodly concern about provision, performance, or reputation (see for example Matt 6:25-34; 10:19; Luke 10:41; 12:11; 12:22-32). Worry dwells on and is preoccupied with some fear. Worry weighs down the heart and chokes out the Word of God (Prov 12:25; Luke 21:34; Matt 13:22 see also Mark 4:19 and Luke 8:14)

So, is worry a sin? Remember what we said on our first day. “Believers must be careful to never call anything a disease that the Bible calls sin and to never call anything sin that the Bible does not clearly identify as sin.” Does the Bible clearly identify worry/anxiousness as sin? Yes, God does not mince words. He commands us: “do not worry...” (Matt 6:31, 34; 10:19; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 22; 1 Cor 7:21) and “be anxious for nothing” (Phil 4:6). If we choose to not obey His commands, that is sin.

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”

²⁶But the Helper, the **Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.** (John 14:26-27)

¹⁹When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, **Your consolations delight my soul.** (Psa 94:19)

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And **the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Phil 4:6-7)

⁷**casting all your anxiety on Him**, because He cares for you. (1 Pet 5:7)

²²**Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;** He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psa 55:22)

²⁸And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:28-29)

“Put on”

³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? **You of little faith!** (Matt 6:30)

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Trust in God;** trust also in me. (John 14:1)

³When I am afraid, **I will put my trust in You.** ⁴In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can *mere* man do to me? (Psa 56:3-4)

Cultivate a deep understanding of God’s attributes, like faithfulness, sovereignty, love, goodness, wisdom, and the “omni-s.

Conclusion

As you seek to address your own difficult life issues and struggle with sin there are several impactful truths to remember. If you have surrendered your life to Christ, then you have been made new, freed from the power of sin, and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. You have been given everything you need for life and godliness. Pursuing a vibrant relationship with Christ through the Bible and prayer is a critical part of spiritual growth.