

HOW WE GROW IN CHRIST

How We Hinder Our Own Growth

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:19-20

INTRODUCTION: Growing in Christ, or sanctification, is not something we can do to ourselves or something we can cause to happen by our own power. It is God who sanctifies us. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that transforms our lives and makes us more holy and more fit for God's purpose day by day.

But like many of the other things God does in our lives, growing in the likeness of Christ is not something God forces upon us. While we cannot accomplish our own sanctification, we can hinder it.

It is easy to see how and why this is true when we remember how God accomplishes our sanctification.

The Holy Spirit grows us to be more like Jesus

- **through our reading**
- **and practicing**

what is written in God's Word.

So, if we refuse to read the Word, or if we refuse to practice the Word, then the transformation of our lives at that particular time is halted.

It is often easier for us to substitute the foolishness of the world for the truth of God and thereby hinder our sanctification.

1 Corinthians 3:19-20 NKJV 19 For **the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God**. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; 20 and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

How do we sometimes make this foolish substitution?

I. WE HINDER OUR CHRISTIAN GROWTH BY DENYING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SIN IN OUR LIVES.

A. By labeling sin as sickness.

1. Recently the World Health Organization added "sex addiction" to its list of mental disorders. USA Today reported that many "experts" hope that the new

- classification will help change people's perception of sex addiction from a moral failure to a medical issue.
2. And the problem with moving it from a moral problem to a medical one is that then the perpetrator loses all responsibility for his or her actions. Who is going to blame someone for having a sickness? Will you become angry with a person who has cancer or a tumor or a broken bone?
 3. And most certainly, the person whose sin is classified as a medical disease will reject all invitations to repent and will quickly be convinced that he is not living in sin but has a physical malady that, bless his heart, he must endure.
 4. Whatever the sin, our world is willing to label it a disease,
 - a. stealing is called kleptomania
 - b. drunkenness is called alcoholism
 - c. rebellion is called yes-no syndrome
 - d. About six weeks ago, Karen and I drove to see my brother in Texas whose wife had passed away. In some little East Texas town I got pulled over and given a ticket for doing 52 in a 45 zone.
 - What would the policeman have said if I told him, "Officer, I just have Lazy Leg Syndrome? My leg just gets tired and allows my foot to press too hard on the gas pedal."
 - Instead of giving me a ticket, he would probably have locked me up!
 - And what if you were the judge, would you give me leniency because of my Lazy Leg medical infirmity?
 - Or would you have doubled the fine because I tried to create an excuse for the real problem and that is that I sinned by not obeying the civil authorities God had put in place.
 5. And the worst part of trying to mislabel sin as sickness, is after you do, you find for all these sicknesses so called, there is no cure; because it is not a sickness.

We also hinder our sanctification.

B. By calling sin natural.

1. Homosexuality - alternate lifestyle
2. Aug. 15, 1994 Time, an American news magazine, article says that adultery is a result of our evolution from non-monogamous gibbons.
3. This is not to deny that there are physiological or genetic factors within us that motivate us or tempt us to sin. In fact, the Bible at least hints of this in reference to the sin nature and in reference to our own internal lusts. It would

not be surprising that when man first fell into sin that the resulting sin nature that was then passed on to every descendent of Adam and Eve effected even the genetic makeup of man.

4. But the Bible clearly teaches that while the proclivity to sin is inherited, we still make a choice whether to sin or not to sin. We are responsible.

There seems to be scientific evidence that some people are more genetically predisposed toward alcoholism. This predisposition does not make them take their first drink or go on their first drunk. Therefore, if they drink and damage their body or their testimony or hurt someone else physically or spiritually, they are still responsible; and what they have done is sin.

The sin nature leaves all of us with certain proclivities to certain sins. Yours may be different than mine, but we both have them. However, the sin nature does not force us to sin. We choose to sin. If we are to be transformed and have victory over a repeated sin in our life, we must begin by being honest and calling it what it is. It is not sickness and it is not natural. It is sin.

- a. **A person must come to salvation by first accepting responsibility, "I am a sinner."**
- b. **A person begins to grow by accepting responsibility, "I have sinned. I repent. By God's power I can change."**

Proverbs 5:21-22 NKJV For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, And he is caught in the cords of his sin.

II. WE HINDER OUR SANCTIFICATION BY ADOPTING A "HELPLESS VICTIM" MENTALITY.

- Folks, please hear me carefully for a moment. Whenever I teach this truth I pray, "God, help me, and all of us, by the power of thy Holy Spirit to choose the right words to carefully and clearly communicate this truth from your Word."
 1. This truth of the Scripture is not given to minimize the sin that someone has committed against you. It is not to in any way justify or excuse it.
 2. This truth is to help the victim of sin not be further victimized by the false counsel of the world that often holds them prisoner, rather than to set them free.
- **The world will often say to those who are victims of other's sins, "You cannot help what you do. It is the result of what was done to you."**

1. The world says, "You cannot help being that way, it is the result of your past...what your parents did or did not do...what your spouse did or did not do...what your teacher did or did not do."
2. The world says, "You cannot help being bitter and unforgiving because of the awfulness of what he did to you."
3. The world teaches you that it is OK to build walls of unforgiveness and hatred and anger in which to entrap the one who injured you.

The trouble is that when the walls are built, the jailhouse door is slammed and the lock snaps shut, you discover that you have locked yourself in. You are not only the victim, but you are also the prisoner. And often times you will peer through the window of the cell and watch the very one who sinned against you running free. And your heart will sink to the very depths of despair.

- **God's truth is**

1. **It is not your business to capture and torment the one who sinned against you.**

Romans 12:19 NKJV Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

2. **It is the unforgiver who is imprisoned and tormented, not the unforgiven.**

Matthew 18:21-35 21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat,

saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

3. You are not **condemned** to live with an ungodly attitude, habit, or characteristic because of anything someone else did.
4. If you are willing, God can **remake** you into the very likeness of Christ and give you victory over that area of sin in your life.

III. WE HINDER OUR GROWTH IN HOLINESS BY CHOOSING AN EASIER PATH THAN THE DISCIPLINE OF APPLYING GOD'S WORD.

A. By choosing what "**seems** right" rather than what God says is right.

So often I will have people say to me in justifying their actions which are contrary to God's Word, "But it just seems right to me."

Proverbs 14:12 NKJV There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

1. A woman will say, "I just need to divorce him. It's not good for the kids to see us fight all the time. They would be better off if I could give them a more peaceful environment. It just seems right."
2. But that woman does not see as God sees.
 - a. She does not see that she is not going to be able to provide financially what the kids need by herself.
 - b. She does not see that those kids need a daddy just like they need a mommy.

- c. She does not see the heartache and heartbreak of those children as their home is ripped in two that will last for years and possibly the rest of their lives.
 - d. And she does not see, what God could do if they turned their lives to Him to let him make them in His likeness.
 - e. She does not see how God could use this transformation to introduce Himself to her children and affect their lives for eternity.
3. And that is the problem with choosing what seems right to us.
- We look into the future and we see the hill immediately in front of us.
 - And we see several paths that lead over that hill.
 - We choose the one that seems the easiest or the fastest.
 - The problem is we cannot see where that path leads when it goes over the crest.

But God can!

- So His Word directs us into a path that when it crosses the crest, the path continues to take us toward His goal, safely and directly.
- But our path, which seems right, may be a dead end on the other side of the hill.
- Or worse yet, may lead to a precipice from which we would fall to our death.

Proverbs 14:12 NKJV There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

IV. WE HINDER OUR GROWTH IN CHRIST BY A REFUSAL OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

- A. By refusing to be a member of a church.
- B. By refusing the loving but probing questions of a brother in Christ.
- C. By refusing the biblical admonition or godly rebuke of a Christian brother.

CONCLUSION: Are you helping or hindering God's sanctification in your life?

1. By refusing to take responsibility for your sin?

2. By adopting a victim mentality that excuses your own sin and entraps you rather than finding freedom through forgiveness?
3. By choosing “what seems right” instead of what God says is right?
4. By refusing to be accountable in church and godly friends?