

HOW WE GROW IN CHRIST

Practical Steps of Growing in Christ

TEXT: Romans 8:28-29

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

INTRODUCTION: Here is the goal. We are to grow in Christ so that we might be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus in His thoughts, character, attitude, actions, and desires.

- We have seen that this happens by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within each and every follower of Christ.
- We have seen that the Holy Spirit transforms our lives to be like Jesus as we put into practice the things written in the Bible, the Word of God.

So, today, in the final message of this short but very important study we have been doing on growing in Christ, I want to boil this down to the practical steps of how we grow to be like the Lord Jesus.

I. BE SAVED.

A. Only the saved can be sanctified.

B. Any other change is superficial and temporary.

C. This is another reason for the urgency of sharing the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, God has called us into the most significant work in the universe and the most important work of all time. You could be a great research biologist and discover a cure for every form of cancer. If you did, you would bless a multitude of lives by extending their time on this earth by years, perhaps dozens of years.

But that is nothing compared with being an agent for getting them into heaven to live for all eternity with the Savior. By your trusting in Christ and receiving the gift of eternal life, then growing more and more in His likeness, and then as you are a witness of what the Lord has done in your life to save and change you, and as you share the gospel that explains to others how they can be saved and transformed also, my friend, you are doing God's work, eternal work. Nothing, nothing is more important than what God by His grace has called us in this room to do!

If you will share the unadulterated gospel, then whoever believes its proclamation will be changed forever. Their saved and sanctified life will bring glory to the Lamb of God, who alone is worthy of all praise and adoration forever.

If you want to God to really change your own life, then first be saved.

Then ...

II. LEARN WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT YOU. (COME TO A BIBLICAL SELF-IMAGE.)

A. You are created in the image of God and are therefore designed to be all God wants you to be.

- 1. You have the capacity for relationship and fellowship with your Creator!**
- 2. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. God has perfectly designed the unchangeable features of your life.**

What are some of those unchangeable features God has perfectly designed?

- a. Your family background**
 - b. Your national, racial, ethnic heritage**
 - c. Your unchangeable physical characteristics**
 - d. God picked these for you, and though they may not be what you wanted, God will use them to help you become all He has purposed you to be.**
3. It is at this point that the world's current emphasis on self-esteem begins to go astray.
 - a. Esteem means to regard favorably,
 - b. The world says that because you have evolved into such a wonderful creature that you should highly honor yourself, and this very popular philosophy quickly moves from esteem to exaltation.
 - c. But the Bible shows us that while we highly regard the fact that we are created in God's image and that we should acknowledge the wonder of His handiwork in making us in such a wonderful way, the end result should not be the exaltation of the creation but the exaltation of the Creator.

Psalm 139:14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

- d. **A biblical understanding of who we are causes us to refuse to glorify self and instead gives the glory to the Lord our God.**

Psalm 100:3 Know that the LORD, He is God; **It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;** We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

But all the good that results from our creation in the image of God, (our incredible design, the invitation to relationship and fellowship with God Himself) is tainted by the fact that we are born dead in trespasses and sin.

B. Our sin nature prevents us from becoming all God wants us to be.

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, **who were dead in trespasses and sins,**

1. We have inherited a sin nature from Adam.
2. As soon as we were old enough, we began to act according to that sin nature and to rebel against the God who created us.
3. Our sin will not allow a relationship with God.
4. Our sin prevents our fellowship with God.
5. Our sin prevents us from using God's design to accomplish its intended purpose in our lives.
6. At this point, **the world's philosophy on self-esteem** leads many in the way of destruction, for it **encourages us to accept ourselves just as we are, sin and all.**

The world says,	The Bible says,
Just accept yourself the way you are.	You can be like Christ. (Rom. 8:29)
Just be you and do not let anybody try to change you.	Allow God by the power of the Holy Spirit to change your life. (Rom. 15:16)
You are the way you are.	You can be what God wants you to be. (Eph. 4:17-24)

<p>If you are having problems, at the root of it is that you do not like something about the way you are.</p>	<p>At the root of many problems is sin. While the result of problems may be covered by temporary treatments, the problem will not be solved until we have dealt with the root sin. (1 Tim. 6:10-11)</p>
<p>What you need to do is to learn to love yourself just as you are, and everything will be all right.</p>	<p>What you need to do is to discover the sin at the root of the problem and deal with it biblically. (Ps. 139:23-24)</p>
<p>All you need is a new <u>self-image</u>.</p>	<p>What you need is <u>transformation</u> into the likeness of Christ. (1 Thess. 4:3)</p>

C. Christ working in you is the only way for you to become what God wants you to be.

1. When you were saved, He gave you a new nature to give you victory over your sin nature.
2. The Holy Spirit indwells you and empowers you to act according to that new nature and to obey God.
3. You are put in a family relationship with God.
4. You are given fellowship with God.
5. God begins to transform your life so as to accomplish God's design for you.
6. And this is the third way in which the popular view of self today contradicts the Scripture.
 - a. The world says that you probably cannot change.
 - b. But if you can, it will require a lot of therapy.
 - c. God says that if you have been saved, you are ready for change.
 - d. You have the most powerful agent for change available living in you.
 - e. Your part is trust and obedience.

III. WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A PROBLEM, SEARCH THE SCRIPTURE FOR WHAT IT SAYS CAN CAUSE THIS PROBLEM.

- A. For example: anger - Do a Bible study on anger.**

There are over 300 references with the word anger. If you do not want to read them all, you do not really want help.

B. Another example: depression - Do a Bible study on sadness.

C. List any commands or specific instructions that deal with the problem.

1. If you were doing this study on anger, you would find the following:
2. Psalm 37:8 warns us to cease from anger because it only causes harm.

Ps. 37:8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret – *it only causes harm.*

3. James 1:20 tells us specifically that our anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

James 1:20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

4. Galatians 5:19-21 lists angry outbursts as one of the works of the flesh that is opposite of the fruit of the Spirit.

Gal. 5:19-21 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

5. Proverbs 29:22 warns us that anger just stirs up more strife and causes other sins to abound.

Prov. 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.

6. Therefore, Colossians 3:8 says that Christians are to put off anger and wrath.

Col. 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

D. Search for biblical characters that had the problem.

1. If someone dealt with the problem successfully, ask why.

(John, the apostle was once called a Son of Thunder. Later he was known as the disciple of love. What happened?)

2. If someone did not deal with the problem successfully, ask why not.

(Samson became an angry, bitter man. His life and ministry were ruined by his unforgiveness.)

IV. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURE FOR WHAT IT SAYS TO DO ABOUT THE CAUSE.

If you need help, go to your Lifechange Group Teacher, or a mature born again believer, a staff member, or one of our pastors, who can help you do the above. Do not expect them to do the work for you but to guide you in how to do the searching and studying.

V. WHATEVER YOU FIND THAT GOD SAYS TO DO, DO IT.

A. Do not say, "I do not see how that can solve the problem."

B. Example: The Corinthians were sick and dying due to their sin in the way they misused the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

1. They could have spent years testing the unleavened bread for bacteria,
2. the grape juice for contamination, and
3. they could have looked for the source of salmonella poisoning.
4. When Paul said, "It's because you partook in an unworthy manner," some might have responded, "What could that have to do with this?"

CONCLUSION: One of God's purposes for our lives is for us to grow in the likeness of Christ. This is not a pipe dream or fantasy. It can be a present reality.

