

Personal Spiritual Growth

Week 4 Conquering Sin

Week 4 – Summary

The core task of growing in Christ is conquering sin. Sin is the root of our immaturity in Christ. The secret to conquering sin is recognizing that the power to conquer sin is found in the Spirit not in our self determination and that the means of conquering sin is changing the way we think. Sin is a matter of the heart. Progress against sin begins with a desire for holiness.

I. Defining the Goal

Before we can conquer sin in our lives we must first be convicted that we are sinners. Sometimes we grow comfortable with our growth in Christ because we begin to see ourselves as generally “good.” The goal of our transformation is to attain to the goal of statements in the Bible such as “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” or “be holy for God is holy” or “imitate God.” Anything that keeps us from attaining that goal is sin. Caution – do not think that your salvation depends upon reaching a certain level of being “sin free.” We are saved by grace on the basis of faith, not on the basis of our progress. That fact is what motivates us to “pursue perfection, out of reverence for Christ.” Both our salvation and our progress against sin are gifts from God and are not something we can boast about. Consider the following passages on this idea. Matthew 5:1-48; Phil 2:1-19; Eph 5:1-21; 1 Pet 2:1-12; 2 Cor 7:1

II. Approach Matters

How we approach sin will make a significant difference in our success in conquering it. Consider the following comparisons.

Behavior Issue vs. Attitude Issue

The Bible is clear that sin has a “delusional” effect on our thinking (Rom 1, Titus 1:15). Sometimes we think that the best approach to correcting a sinful behavior is to focus on exerting more self-control over our actions. In reality self-control alone will not overcome the problem, because the root of the problem resides in our attitude about the sin. We first need to change our thinking on the matter (Eph 4, Rom 12) and then put our self control to work. Part of this “attitude adjustment” involves searching for the desire to change.

Must / Should vs. Desire / Want

Wanting to change is very different from having to change. We will never really change until we want to change. If we don’t want to change we may manage to control our behavior, but our attitude and mind will be resentful, resistant, and provide a sturdy foot-hold for justifying what we desire. When it comes down to it, if we have the Holy Spirit then there is no temptation or sin that is too big for us to defeat (1 Cor 10:13). If this is really true, then the only thing that prevents us from defeating temptations is our desire to defeat it.

Personal Discipline vs. Power of Spirit

We discussed the role of the Holy Spirit in week 2 of this study. Self-control is not enough to conquer sin. If it were, Jesus death and God’s gift of the Spirit were unnecessary because we could have dealt with the problem ourselves. We must recognize that we need the power of the Spirit and we must confess our pride in thinking we could do it alone.

Secret vs. Confession

Satan gains power whenever he can convince us that we don’t need help. When we try to keep our sins secret from others and from God we are pretending to be something we are not. We are commanded to confess to one another and to God (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9f). Confession breaks the root of pride that wants to live in denial of our sinfulness.

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Go It Alone vs. Faithful Friends

We want to keep our sin as private as possible. Often we fail to confess specific sins to God and even less often will we confess specific sins to a faithful friend. Paul's letter to the Galatians encourages us to fulfill our role as the "priesthood of believers" (1 Pet 2) and "restore" each other when we get caught in sin. There is great comfort and power in helping one another grow in Christ. Once again it is our pride that keeps us from admitting our problem....and it will be pride that keeps us from growing in faith.

Consider developing a spiritual friendship with at least one other person, a person whom you can trust to always have your best interest in mind.

All or Nothing vs. Growing Success

Having the goal of perfection can work against us by allowing Satan to whisper, "what's the point." If total success is not possible sometimes we start thinking that partial success has no value. Conquering sin and growing in faith are tasks that will take the rest of our lives. The process will have periods of progress, periods of plateau, and periods of regression. As Paul says in Phil 3:16, "only let us live up to what we have already attained." If your goal is to read your Bible everyday, celebrate the progress associated with reading it 3-4 days a week. Don't wait for the miraculous overnight growth spurt just keep striving forward one step at a time.

III. Unveiling Our Sinful Nature

Different circumstance and different reflections on life will reveal areas in our life where sin reigns. Consider the following aspects of sin's stronghold in our lives and use them as learning tools for growth. Actively conquering sin requires an awareness of our sins.

Personality Strengths and Liabilities

Every personality type or temperament has a set of strengths but also a set of corresponding liabilities. That is part of the reason that each of us has different sins and weaknesses that we deal with.

Understanding our personality may help us identify areas where we need to work against the natural liabilities. For examples

Personality Strength	Liability
Talkative	Poor Listener
Friendly	Undependable
Strong-willed	Angry outbursts
Independent	Domineering
Productive	Self-sufficient
Idealistic	Critical
Practical	Lazy

Stress & Relationships

Sometimes our attitudes and behaviors are different when we are in different situations. Close relationships and stress are two situations where our need for growth may be more visible than in other situations. Pay attention to yourself in both of these areas of life.

Worldly Thinking

John says in 1 John 2:15f talks about the world in terms of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. It's amazing how many false gods are contained in these three statements.

IV. Process Thoughts

- ❖ **Aware** – the first step is becoming aware of sin
- ❖ **Unmask** – Sin at its core is a lie that we have accepted as true, the first step is to clearly identify the lie we have listened to
- ❖ **Translate** – translate the lie, the false belief into one that reflects the truth of God
- ❖ **Outline** – outline for yourself a plan of attack

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