

Introduction: review of "Spiritual Growth" - Pt.1.

**I. THE BIBLICAL GOAL** (Rom8:29) – *The ultimate goal of our Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ.*

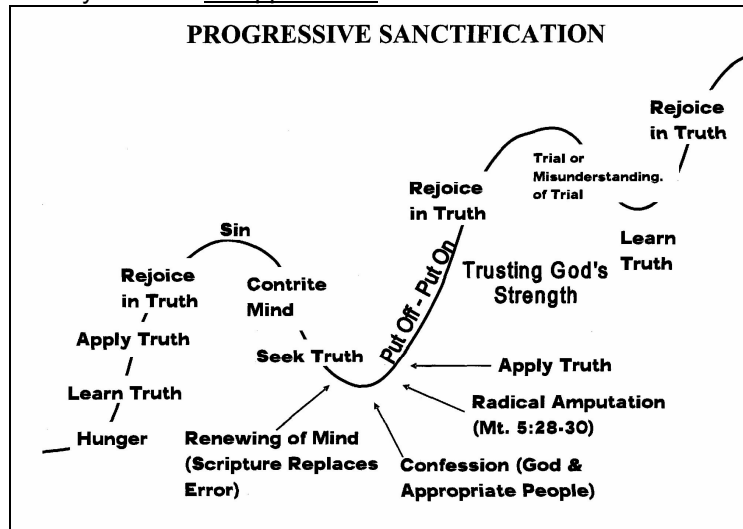
**II. THE BIBLICAL EXPECTATION** (2Pet3:18) - *God expects, and commands, for us to be growing as Christian.*

**III. THE BIBLICAL METHOD** (Phil2:12-13) - *We grow by a dependent and self-disciplined obedience to His Word.*

- This a continuation of that message, 3 more things to say about spiritual growth.

#### IV. THE BIBLICAL PROGRESSION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Philippians 3:12-14

- *There is to be real, though imperfect, growth into the likeness to Christ in our life.*
- The theological term is progressive sanctification. It is true change, but progressive.
- There is hope, in that perfection is not expected. There is hope, in that when there are failures, God continues His work, and the perfect will one day come. – Philippians 1:6



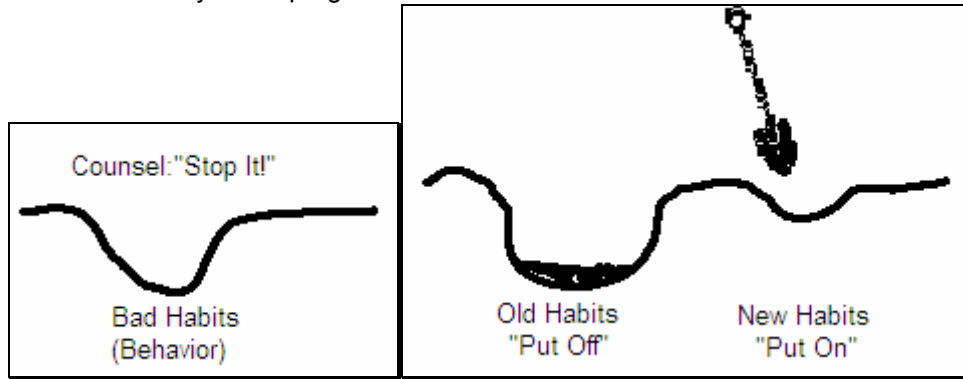
#### V. THE BIBLICAL OPTIMISM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Philippians 4:13

- Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Not in some silly sense, but all those things which God calls me to do. Not "He will do all things", but "I can do"
- There is the frequent theme of determination throughout Scripture (example in the Psalm 101).
- If there is anything we can be confident about, it is that God desires our spiritual growth, and we are to see all things as working in our lives for that purpose.
- The reason we can be so confident is not that we are complete in and of ourselves, but that God has provided everything we need for life and godliness (2Peter 3:1), and has equipped us for every good work (2Timothy 3:16)
- When it comes to doing what God calls us to do, the answer is never is never "I can't". We can say "I can't by myself", but then follow it with "I can and will with His help."
- This is also rooted in God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13, that God will not allow anything to be too much for us.
- The qualifier to that is if we do things His way. Things can and do overwhelm us and are too much for us, without God's help and direction and our following it.
- Remember that what things are impossible with men are possible with God. We believe in God's supernatural power in us by the Holy Spirit. If from the beginning we do not have this kind of optimism, our claims to inability will be self-fulfilling prophecies.

#### VI. THE BIBLICAL PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Ephesians 4:22-24

- *Fundamental to our change is putting off old thinking and behavior putting on new ways by the renewing of the mind.*
- We are by nature creatures of habit. If we were not, think about what life would be like.
- We have ingrained (almost hard-wired) us not only certain patterns of behavior, but also of thinking. We have learned to respond to things around us from our childhood in certain ways. The way to change this is by a purposeful and repeated re-thinking and re-behaving.
- We will come back later to the issue of the heart and the idols of the heart, so I will only say at this point (without seeking to prove) that in Scripture the heart is not primarily the emotions, but rather a synonym for the inner man, our thinking, our soul or spirit. It is that which is distinct from our mere material nature.
- According to this verse, there is one primary thing, the changing of the inner man, then the secondary thing, the change of behavior.
- We act and live and respond according to what we believe and how we think. While there is a place for dealing with behavior (and it is an important place), eventually or at the same time the issues of the heart need to be dealt with (again, we will come back to this).

- At this point I want us to consider the issue of "put off/put on" – This is description of a kind of rehabilitation of our regular (i.e. sinful) ways of thinking and acting, and replacing them with the right ways. This takes thought and hard work, and it is initially much easier to revert to the things we have habitually done.
- Illustration: Two ditches. Only make progress as we fill old ditch with dirt from new one.



- Change doesn't happen in a vacuum, or merely by trying to stop thinking/doing something. The wrong must always be replaced by the opposite right. The vice must be replaced by Spirit-empowered virtue.
- This is not mere behaviorism, but a Spirit-empowered re-establishment of new habits, or Spiritual Rehabilitation.
- All that has already been said must be kept in perspective: the standard of the Word of God, the dependence on the Holy Spirit. But reading the Bible and praying by themselves to not effect change. The responsibility of the person is essential.