

Keys to Spiritual Growth

Purity, Unity and Spiritual Gifts

2 Peter 3:18

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Purity, Unity and Spiritual Gifts¹

Scripture

Today we conclude my sermon series on “Keys to Spiritual Growth.” My foundational text for this series is 2 Peter 3:18:

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Introduction

In his book, *By Divine Design*, Dana Key tells the story of a man named Konnie Stevens who took over as pastor of a large southern church after spending eight years ministering in Moscow and other Eastern European cities some years ago. Things had changed a lot in America, especially in the world of technology. Cable TV, computers, cell phones—it all got a bit confusing. So when pastor Stevens complained to his new secretary that he didn’t think that the paging device folks asked him to wear was working, she was gentle in pointing out that he was wearing his garage door opener! That, of course, also explained why his pager wasn’t having much success opening the garage door!²

Pastor Stevens had all the tools. He just needed a little good information on how to use them.

Christians today have all the tools for spiritual growth. We just need a little good information on how to use the tools that God has given us for our growth.

That is why I have been preaching a series titled “Keys to Spiritual Growth.” It has been my intention to give you some information to help you grow spiritually.

¹ Much of the material for these sermons comes from Dr. John MacArthur.

² Dana Key, *By Divine Design* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 57.

Over the previous few weeks I said that the master key to all spiritual growth is the glory of God. God has created all things—including us—for his own glory. Living for the glory of God is the master key to spiritual growth. But there are other keys as well. So far we have looked at the following keys to spiritual growth:

1. Confessing Christ as Lord
2. Aiming Our Lives at Glorifying God
3. Confessing Our Sins
4. Trusting God
5. Bearing Fruit
6. Praising God
7. Loving God
8. Praying
9. Proclaiming
10. Witnessing

Lesson

Today, let's look at the last three keys that I want to mention that will help you grow spiritually. These keys are:

1. Purity
2. Unity
3. Spiritual gifts

I. Purity

A vital key to spiritual growth is maintaining moral purity.

You cannot grow spiritually while embracing an impure lifestyle. First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

In this passage Paul is discussing moral purity, a topic relevant to our amoral society. Today's permissiveness has affected

even the church, which is growing increasingly tolerant of sin—particularly sexual sin.

Years ago Eileen overheard a young man say when asked whether or not he was married, “Well, I guess you could say so.” People in our culture cannot even tell anymore whether or not they are married!

In my own experience, I am no longer surprised when a young couple comes to me for pre-marital counseling and I learn that they are sexually active. In fact, I am now surprised when I learn that they are *not* sexually active. And this is consistent with the experience of other pastors.

In 1 Corinthians 6:13 Paul says, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.”

The Greek word translated “sexual immorality” is *pornea*, from which we get the English word “pornography.” Its meaning includes all forms of sexual sin.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul gives three reasons for avoiding sexual immorality: it is harmful, it is enslaving, and it is a perversion.

A. *Sexual Sin is Harmful*

First, sexual sin is harmful.

Paul began by saying, “Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial” (1 Corinthians 6:12a).

The Greek word translated “beneficial” (*sumphero*) means “to be profitable.” In the *King James Version* the word “beneficial” is translated as “expedient.” The English word “expedient” contains the Latin word *ped*, which means, “foot.” “Expedient,” then, means “keeping the foot free from entanglement.” Something that is not expedient, therefore, would hinder us on our spiritual journey by tangling up our feet.

Sexual immorality is one such thing. It never helps but only harms. First Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality . . . [because] he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

There are numerous illustrations of the damage caused by sexual immorality.

For example, Proverbs 5-7 and 9 contain extensive lists of the devastating physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences of illicit sex.

David's adultery with Bathsheba led to other sin (such as the murder of Uriah) and eventually left him racked with guilt. When he wrote Psalm 38, he was desperately alone and literally physically sick as a result of his sin.

Hophni and Phinehas were the sons of Eli, the high priest at the time. They led debauched lives—even though members of the priestly line were expected to uphold high moral standards. Among other things, they “slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting” (1 Samuel 2:22). Because of their sins, God killed them (1 Samuel 2:25, 34; 4:11).

Sexual sin has terrible consequences and must be avoided. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

B. Sexual Sin Is Enslaving

Second, sexual sin is enslaving.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12b Paul says, “Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything.”

The sin of sexual immorality, like all other sins, enslaves. I know of some men who regularly attend worship services, and just as regularly look at pornographic material. Recently I spoke to a woman who was separated from her husband because she said that she was tired of his hollow repentance. Over a period of many years he kept going back to pornography. Then, when he got caught he would repent. Some time later he would go back to pornography. Then he would get caught and repent again. And the cycle went on and on and on.

The more you give in to sexual sin, the more it controls you. That's why Paul determined *beforehand* not to do anything that would enslave him.

Let me urge anyone who is struggling with pornography to deal with it. Find a confidante you can trust and ask him or her to hold you accountable so that you can break the cycle of pornography in your life.

And parents, think about what you allow your children to watch on TV or on the internet. Do you know what they are watching? Do you have a way to keep your child accountable in this area?

C. *Sexual Sin Is a Perversion*

And third, sexual sin is a perversion.

The Bible teaches that our bodies have three distinct purposes. Sexual sin perverts the intention of God for our bodies.

The first purpose for our bodies is that our bodies are for the Lord.

First Corinthians 6:13-14 says, “‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food’—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.”

The Corinthians apparently used the phrase “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” as a slogan to justify sexual immorality. They were implying that indiscriminate sexual activity was a necessary, natural, bodily function, just like eating.

We often hear the same thing today. People say, “Why do you get upset about sex? We are all sexual beings. We should express ourselves. We eat, drink, sleep, walk, and run when we want to. Why not have sex when we want to? It's biological.”

Paul says that God has greater purposes for our bodies than food or sex, which are both temporary because God will eventually destroy them both (v. 13).

Our bodies are for the Lord; he has redeemed them for resurrection and glorification. Why adulterate the special purpose God has for our bodies?

The second purpose for our bodies is that our bodies are one with Christ.

In verses 15-17 Paul says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”

When a Christian joins with a prostitute, he is involving Christ (with whom he is one) in that vile relationship.

Verse 18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

Sexual sin damages our bodies, which are “members of Christ” (v. 15).

And the third purpose for our bodies is that our bodies are a temple.

Verses 19-20 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” We should not be involved in sexual immorality because the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

We find the key to moral purity in verse 20: “Therefore honor God with your body.”

From time to time I meet people involved in an adulterous relationship who are convinced they have God’s blessing. “We believe that it is God’s will,” they say.

But that is impossible: no one living in a state of immorality can glorify (i.e. honor) God.

So, sexual sin is harmful, enslaving, and a perversion. To grow spiritually we must be morally pure.

II. Preserving Unity

Another key to spiritual growth is preserving unity.

We grow faster when we don't have to grow alone. Hebrews 10:24 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

All of us in the Body of Christ have received spiritual gifts, so we can minister to each other and stimulate growth. Therefore God is glorified in the unity of the saints. Romans 15:5-6 says, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

God doesn't expect us to struggle along the path of spiritual growth alone. The Bible teaches us three ways of preserving unity.

A. *By Accepting One Another*

First, unity is preserved by accepting one another.

Romans 15:7 says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Paul was saying, "Don't exclude anyone. Christ accepted us; do we have a higher standard for our group than he does?" Christians desperately need to interact with one another; no one grows in a vacuum. We need to accept Christians as brothers and sisters, as fellow family members.

B. *By Being Accountable to One Another*

Second, unity is preserved by being accountable to one another.

I have found the closer I am to godly people around me, the easier it is for me to live a righteous life because they hold me accountable. If something isn't right in my life, they point it out to me. God has given me a wife and children who expect me to walk

a righteous path. If I stray from it, one or more of them will inform me that I am out of line.

It is easy for a person to say, “I am going to live my spiritual life the best way I can without getting involved in a church or having close friends. I’m the quiet type.” But that person will have a difficult time growing.

Accountability applies a helpful pressure toward godliness. We need the provocation Hebrews 10:24 mentions—which is, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds”—to guide us into spiritual habits.

C. By Eliminating Division

And third, unity is preserved by eliminating division.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul says, “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

In verses 11-13 he says to cut out all the contentions, factions, and cliques. He wanted them to be unified because they needed one another.

We grow better in a group than we do alone.

III. Using Our Spiritual Gifts

The final key I want to mention regarding spiritual growth is using our spiritual gifts.

God gifts all Christians for spiritual service. Martin E. Clark wrote that “God does not bring interests, experiences, abilities, or limitations into our lives capriciously, but rather, purposefully. Consequently, an examination of ourselves and our past experiences can bring genuine insight into God’s plan.”³

³ Martin E. Clark, *Choosing Your Career* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 26.

I've always loved the story of Eric Liddell. His life was immortalized in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. He had felt the call of God to go to China as a missionary with his sister.

The most gripping scene in the movie to me was when he told his sister Jenny that he was going to delay leaving for the mission field so that he could continue training for the 1924 Olympics in Paris. She was crestfallen. He sought to help her understand by saying, "Jenny, Jenny. I know God created me for his service, but he also made me fast! When I run, I feel God's pleasure!"

When we use the gifts that God has given us we feel his pleasure. We are functioning in the way God intended us to function in order to glorify him.

I believe that each Christian has a unique gift (or combination of the gifts listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12) intended to meet a particular need in the body of Christ.

Therefore Peter said, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

So don't teach mere human wisdom if you have speaking gift, and don't work in the flesh if you have a serving gift. When we use our gift for God's glory and not for our own, we will grow spiritually.

Conclusion

We grow spiritually when we glorify God by confessing Christ as Lord, aiming our lives at glorifying God, confessing our sins, trusting God, bearing fruit, praising God, loving God, praying, proclaiming God's word, witnessing, maintaining moral purity, preserving unity, and using our spiritual gifts.

A. *The Command*

Second Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” That’s a command. Your reply is either “yes” or “no.” When you say, “Yes, Lord, I want to mature,” you will experience blessing, usefulness, and victory by following the biblical path of glorifying God.

B. *The Result*

In Psalm 16:8-9 David says, “I have set the LORD always before me. . . . Therefore my heart is glad.” Spiritual maturity produces joy. According to Ephesians 2:7 God will pour out his kindness on us throughout all eternity. He wants our entire lives to be characterized by joy and contentment, but that can happen only when we are growing spiritually.

C. *The Goal*

The apostle John summed up the goal of spiritual growth: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

The growth process will end the day we see Jesus Christ and become like him. Until then, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for what we have learned in the keys to spiritual growth.

You are supremely and rightly concerned about your own glory. You have created us and all things for your own glory. We are enabled to glorify you when we grow spiritually as you intend for us to grow spiritually.

Help each one of us to glorify you by confessing Christ as Lord, aiming our lives at your glory, confessing our sin, trusting you, bearing fruit, loving you, praying, proclaiming your Word, witnessing, maintaining moral purity, preserving unity, and using our spiritual gifts.

All of this we pray in Jesus' name, to whom be glory both now and forever! Amen.

CHARGE:

May God help each one of us to grow spiritually. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.