

2 Timothy

I. Introduction

- A. **2 Timothy 2:20-22** . . . “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone **cleanses himself** from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. [22] Now **flee** from youthful lusts and **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
- B. In an effort to give you some practical ways to live according to these verses, we started last Sunday looking at the HOW, or the method of **cleansing** ourselves, **fleeing** youthful lusts, and **pursing** godliness.
1. We used the example of Israel being freed from enslavement in Egypt and taking the Promised Land to confirm several important truths regarding the HOW of growing in godliness.
 2. **First**, we affirmed that (1) our salvation from the penalty, power, and practice of sin is all God’s doing, while (2) our sanctification, that is, resisting temptation, putting away our old sinful ways, and replacing them with godly ways is the combined work of God and us.
 3. **Second**, we affirmed that the process of cleansing ourselves by killing off the evil that is within us, and replacing it with godliness, is an elongated process that takes time – a long time.
 - a. Taking a long time is not a bad thing. In fact, God, in His wisdom, determined it is to be this way – though we can add to the time it takes by failing to do our part as we ought.
 - b. We also looked at two reasons God made growth in godliness an elongated process. **First**, given our human weaknesses and the legitimate limits on our time, we can only deal with one or two selfish or sinful ways at a time. **Second**, limiting the number of evils we can work at putting out of our life at a time significantly decreases the probability of getting discouraged by the effort required and the failures that are often experienced in the first weeks or months of effort.
 4. To sum up: once we are born again – which is all God’s doing – we face the responsibility of **joining God** in putting off our old nature and putting on the new nature God has for us, of dying to self and coming alive to God, and of denying self and following Christ.

C. Pray

II. Principles and truths from God's word for spiritual growth

- A. Based on my understanding of the word of God, I believe that one of God's primary purposes in saving us is to change and transform us – not in spite of our will or against our will, but in agreement with our will.
1. I believe God's primary purpose in saving and transforming us is to make it possible for us to enter into and maintain an intelligent, freely chosen, mutually desired, mutually loving, mutually trusting, and mutually satisfying relationship with Him, and with one another.
 2. I believe mutually loving relationships is the reason Jesus gave us the two great commandments: love God supremely, and love your neighbor as yourself (**Mark 12:30-31**). I believe it is the reason Paul said, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (**Romans 13:10**), and John wrote, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (**1 John 4:10-11**).
 3. In other words, godliness and selflessness are not for the sake of godliness and selflessness, but for the sake of healthy, loving relationships that are for the benefit and protection of everyone. The fact that we fall far short of godliness and selflessness is a primary reason why we need to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace – individually, as families, as a community, as a nation, as a world, and as a church.
- B. Like the OT, the NT speaks about spiritual growth and the method or process involved. Therefore, we will look at several NT passages.
1. **2 Peter 1:2-4**, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; [3] seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. [4] For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."
 - a. God is the One who empowers and equips you for battle against foes too strong for you to defeat on your own. He guarantees victory over your self-centered habits, self-defeating beliefs,

irrational fears, unholy desires, and ungodly pleasures **if you will do battle** against them. And He enables you to replace the evil with good, thus establishing a godly nature and Christ-likeness where your old sinful nature and selfish behavior once ruled.

2. **1 Corinthians 10:13**, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”
 - a. God will not allow anyone to place a temptation before you that is stronger than your current strength, maturity, and ability to resist. In addition, God promises to provide a way to escape temptation’s seduction and captivating allure. Therefore, because of God’s doing, you never have to face irresistible temptation or get beaten down by temptation until you give in.
3. **Romans 8:11-13**, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He (*God*) who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His (*God’s*) Spirit who dwells in you. [12] So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—[13] for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”
 - a. God has given you the Holy Spirit to enable you to put to death the selfish and sinful thinking, desires, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors so that you can put on godly and loving thinking, desires, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors.
4. **James 4:6-10**, “[God] gives a greater grace (*greater than our adultery – giving ourselves to other gods – and greater than His jealousy – over having given ourselves to other gods when we belong to Him*). [So be wise, for] it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ [7] (*Therefore, as a wise, humble Christian*) **Submit** therefore to God. **Resist** the devil and he will flee from you. [8] **Draw near** to God and He will draw near to you. **Cleanse** your hands, you sinners; and **purify** your hearts, you double-minded. [9] **Be miserable and mourn and weep**; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] **Humble yourselves** in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”
 - a. God’s empowerment and enablement for putting away sin and putting on godliness is one of the ways God gives you grace that

is greater than your need. Yet in this area of the Christian life, grace alone is not enough. It must be accompanied by doing what God requires of you – as described in **James 4:7-10** – since you have received God’s empowerment and enablement.

- b. If you will do what is required of you, you will gain victory over your fleshly lusts, you will put on righteousness, grow in faith, love as you ought to love, and be at peace – just like all the believers who call on God from a pure heart.
- C. We know that God has requirements. Does He also have a set standard for godliness? Yes. However, God’s standard creates a significant challenge for most of us – for two primary reasons.
1. **First**, when viewed from a fleshly, self-serving perspective, God’s standard of godliness appears unachievable, and too restrictive for a variety of reasons and in a number of ways. Therefore, many Christians see God’s standard of godliness as unrealistic – and therefore not worth the effort.
 2. **Second**, in my experience, it is rare for Christians to make Jesus Christ and the holy scriptures their basis for evaluating their behavior, thoughts, desires, attitudes, and values.
 - a. We tend to compare ourselves to those worse than us because that helps us feel like we are pretty good and sufficiently godly. And sadly, we do this like we breathe – effortlessly, mindlessly, and repeatedly.
 - b. Yet it is this very action of comparing ourselves to those worse than us that motivates us to treat God’s standard of godliness as unnecessary, and therefore unworthy of our attention.
 3. This brings us to the question: “What is God’s standard for godliness?” To answer this question, we will look to God’s word.
 - a. **Leviticus 19:2b**, “You shall be **holy**, for I the LORD your God am holy.”
 - b. **I Peter 1:14-16**, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; [16] because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”
 - c. **Deuteronomy 18:13**, “You shall be **blameless** before the LORD your God.”
 - d. **Matthew 5:48**, “Therefore you are to be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

4. The scriptures we just looked at make it clear that God has a standard for godliness. However, we are weak and made of flesh, and though this does not nullify God's standard or excuse us from pursuing it, I have several suggestions for working at attaining God's standard that have been helpful to me.
 - a. **First**, in spite of how demanding and unachievable it may seem, hold God's standard as an immovable object so that you will not be tempted to lower it for any reason.
 - b. **Second**, believe that by God's gracious empowerment and enablement you can achieve it – or at least you can make genuine progress toward it. Though in either case, it will take time. So be patient.
 - c. **Third**, do not focus on being perfect. Do not evaluate your progress by the day or the week. Wait at least a month before looking back to see if you are making observable progress. Progress starts in the mind (*repentance*). Then it works itself out in thought, word, and deed.
 - d. **Fourth**, focus on **working the method** God has given you to drive out ungodliness and pursue biblically based godliness. You will change and grow, and over time, you will notice the godly changes that are taking place in your beliefs, values, desires, thinking, speaking, and behaving.
 - e. **Finally**, rather than thinking you are only a good Christian or pleasing to God if you have reached the goal, think of yourself as pleasing God by earnestly and thoughtfully pursuing the goal.
 - (1) In whatever area you reach God's standard in this life, praise God and be grateful for the change.
 - (2) In whatever area you do not reach God's standard in this life, you will have at least made a worthy, God-honoring effort. No one can do more than that.
- D. To achieve any goal, we must make an effort equal to the task, that is, equal to what is required to reach the goal. The same is true in relation to making commendable progress toward achieving God's standard of godliness.
 1. To better understand what I mean by making an effort equal to the task, ponder what it must have been like for the Israelites to do battle with the next walled city, or the next well-equipped army, or the next group of giants, or even the next small village – day after day – until the land was purified of its evil inhabitants.

2. If you can imagine the unrelenting effort required for the Israelites to clear the Land, then you can imagine the extent of the effort required to flee selfish and sinful lusts, and replace them with the ways of godliness. For example:
 - a. Growing in godliness will ultimately take in many more areas of your life than you can imagine today. Therefore, it will take years – and the first 10 or 15 years will seem much harder than those that follow.
 - b. Growing in godliness requires hard, relentless effort.
 - c. Growing in godliness will take daily preparation until enough progress has been made in a particular area that you live in a constant state of preparedness in that area.
 - d. Growing in godliness will take constant vigilance against the rising up of your fleshly desires, the allurements of the world, and the temptations of the devil.
 - e. Growing in godliness requires perseverance, especially when you are discouraged over failure or tired of fighting.
 - f. Growing in godliness will take relentless prayer – prayer that intentionally engages God in the process and seeks from God the help you believe you need to go farther. This is especially true in those few areas that seem like they just won't die.
 - g. Growing in godliness requires meditation and pondering of God's word, God's nature, God's ways, your nature, why you do what you do, and what you need from God and yourself to change and grow.
 - h. Growing in godliness will take a strong commitment to obey God, to please God, and to love God – all things we know we should do but are **not naturally** inclined to do.
3. This list is not meant to discourage you, but to prepare you in the hope that you will not get discouraged.

III. Conclusion

- A. If you learned you had a deadly and progressive form of cancer, and if you were assured that you could be healed by eradicating the cancer from your body, how many cancer cells would you allow to remain in your body because the cure seemed too physically painful and mentally hard?
- B. **I Corinthians 9:24** . . . Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? **Run** in such a way that you may win.