

Purity, Unity, and Using Our Spiritual Gifts

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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REVIEW

Spiritual growth is a commitment to living to the glory of God. As you glorify God in your life, the Spirit of God energizes the process of spiritual maturity so that you become more like Jesus Christ. You go from spiritual infancy to maturity; you grow in grace, and you grow up into Christ. Spiritual growth is a process; it is not instantaneous. We have to commit ourselves to glorify God in order to grow. That is another way of saying that we need to walk in the Spirit, obey the Word of God, let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, conform to His will, and yield our bodies as instruments of righteousness.

In my study of the Bible through the years, I have discovered that there are simple spiritual principles repeated in many ways and forms. Spiritual growth takes Christians from one level of glory to another level of glory in order to conform us more and more to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). We are to live to God's glory, but how do we do that? We have already shared ten ways to glorify God:

I. CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD

II. AIMING OUR LIVES AT GLORIFYING HIM

III. CONFESSING SIN

IV. TRUSTING HIM

V. BEARING FRUIT

VI. PRAISING HIM

VII. LOVING HIM ENOUGH TO OBEY HIM

VIII. PRAYING

IX. PROCLAIMING HIS WORD

X. BRINGING OTHERS TO HIM

Leaving our review, another way that we glorify God is by...

XI. MAINTAINING MORAL PURITY

You cannot grow spiritually with an impure lifestyle.

A. The Discipline of Moral Purity

First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Internally and externally we are commanded to live to the glory of God. And Paul has in mind the area of personal morality.

B. The Danger of Sexual Sin

Today it is essential that we talk about moral purity because we live in such an amoral society. Even within the church of Jesus Christ there now exists a tolerance for sin--particularly sexual sin--that has not been true in the past. Our society is very permissive. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-13 Paul says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the body, and the body for foods; but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord...." The word for "fornication" in the Greek is *porneia*, from which comes the English word pornography. Fornication is a blanket word that covers every possible sexual sin. Paul is saying that we are not to be engaged in sexual sin. He gives three reasons: one, it harms; two, it controls; and three, it perverts.

1. IT HARMS

First Corinthians 6:12 says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." In other words, in our Christian liberty we are free to do certain things, but if those things would harm us, then they are not for our good.

a. The Concept

1) In Greek

The word "expedient" is *sumphero* in the Greek. It literally means, "to bring together." From that literal meaning it came to mean, "to profit." Paul is saying there are things that are okay but not profitable. Aristotle used the word in connection with the pay or the booty of soldiers--they made a profit.

2) In English

In English, part of the word expedient is made up of *ped*, which refers to feet. Adding the prefix gives us *exped* which means, "free feet." In other words, your feet are free from any entanglement. If I did certain things, I wouldn't have free feet; I would get tangled up. Those are things that would harm me. In a sense, all things are permissible within God's grace, but not all things help us--some things entangle and hinder us. As a Christian I'm redeemed eternally and free to do what I want. But even though I have that freedom, there are some things I won't do because they will entangle, bind, and harm me. Immorality is one of those things. It never helps; it only harms.

b. The Consequences

First Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee fornication.... he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." People will say, "I can live anyway I want. I'm a Christian. I'm under grace, God has

forgiven everything, and I've been set free. I'm free from the power of the law because Christ bore my penalty; I'm free from the power of sin because He paid the price; and I'm free from eternal judgment because He bore the judgment of God in His own body." But Paul says, "You are not free to do things that will harm you." Proverbs 5--7 and 9 contain extensive lists of practical exhortation on the harm of fornication. Other examples include:

1) For Israel

First Corinthians 10:8 says, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." Paul says, "Don't commit fornication. You'll find yourself in the same situation as Israel was when twenty three thousand died in one day."

2) For David

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. As a result of that terrible situation, her husband Uriah was killed (2 Sam. 11:1-27). David lived with incredible guilt. According to Psalm 51 he became sick, weak, lonely, sad, and guilty. The horrible harm of sin had come to David.

3) For Hophni and Phinehas

Hophni and Phinehas were the sons of Eli, the high priest. They decided to live any way they wanted regardless of the fact that their father was the high priest, that they themselves stood in the priestly line, and that their lives required a high standard. So, among other things, they committed sexual orgies on the steps of the Temple (1 Sam. 2:22). As a result of their sins, God killed them (1 Sam. 4:11).

4) For Adulterers and Fornicators

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Second, sexual sin not only harms, but...

2. IT CONTROLS

First Corinthians 6:12 says, "...all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." The sin of fornication, like all other sin, enslaves people. I was told of a person who had come to our church Sunday morning for the sermon and then went to pornographic movies in the afternoon because he couldn't free himself from the bondage of his terrible lust. It is so enslaving that the more one gives into it, the more it controls. "Enslaved" is a good translation of coming under the power or domination of something. Paul is saying, "I'm not going to do anything that is going to enslave me"--and that is what sexual evil does.

Sexual sin has a powerful effect on us. It harms, it controls, and...

3. IT PERVERTS

There are three distinct purposes for our bodies that become perverted by sexual sin.

a. Our Body Is For the Lord

First Corinthians 6:13-14 says, "Foods for the body, and the body for foods; but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by his own power." It should be obvious that our bodies are for the Lord because someday He will raise our bodies to dwell in glory. That reveals how much our bodies belong to His plan. The body is not for fornication; it is for the Lord.

1) Man's Reasoning

Paul mocks the Corinthians by using this phrase in verse 13, "Foods for the body, and the body for foods...." In the Greek there are no verbs, so the phrase is "Foods, body, body, foods." You say, "What does that mean?" That was a slogan that they used to indicate a natural function--in this case, sex. They meant, "Sex is just like eating. The body is for food, and food is for the body; the body is for sex, and sex is for the body." People are saying the same thing about sex today, "Why do you get upset about sex? We are all sexual beings. We should express ourselves. We eat, drink, sleep, walk,

run; why not have sex--it's only biological." In Eternity magazine Hugh Hefner says that sex is a biological activity like eating or drinking; there is no reason to be prudish about it. He thinks you should find yourself a girl who's like-minded and let yourself go.

2) God's Rejection

But Paul says that the phrase, "Foods for the body, and the body for foods..." misses the point. God is going to destroy all of it--food, the body, and sex. The body is for God; food and sex are temporary. God didn't redeem your body for sex, but for resurrection and glorification. Why would you want to adulterate the special purpose that God has for your body?

b. Our Body Is One with Christ

First Corinthians 6:15-17 says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid [Gk. *me genoito*--the strongest negative in the Greek language]. What? Know ye not that he who is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." When you are one with Christ and you join yourself to a harlot, you have made Christ one with her. You can't do that. A harlot is anyone who has sex outside of marriage, even if that person is engaged. That is prostituting God's purpose for sex. Our bodies are part of His body, and we are one with Him. We cannot drag Him into some vile relationship without affecting His intended purpose. That is why Paul says, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is outside the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). Every other sin approaches from the outside, but fornication rises up from the inside and reveals an internal corruption. Paul says to keep from fornication because you are one with Christ, and God has another purpose for your body. Third, your body is...

c. Our Body Is a Temple

First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price...." We should not be involved in fornication because the Spirit dwells in us, we are one with Christ, and God has planned to glorify our bodies.

C. The Disobedience of God's Command

The key to moral purity is found in 1 Corinthians 6:20: "...therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit..." From time to time I meet people who are having an illicit relationship. They say, "The Lord has brought us together." They actually think that the Lord has His blessing on their relationship, but that isn't true. There have been cases of an individual married to an unbeliever who meets a Christian and has an affair. Then they try to say that the Lord is in it. But that isn't the case at all. They are not glorifying God. If any of us is living in a state of immorality, there is no way that we can glorify God. Thus there is no way that we can grow spiritually. We grow in purity, not impurity. So as we glorify God in our bodies, we grow in His grace. Spiritual growth involves glorifying God by the existence of moral purity in our lives.

Another way that we glorify God is by...

XII. PRESERVING UNITY

We grow faster when we don't have to grow alone--when we are stimulated. Hebrews 10:24 says, "...let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Within the body of Christ we have been given spiritual gifts in order to minister to each other and stimulate growth.

A. Embrace Unity

God is glorified in the unity of the saints. Romans 15:5 says, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." Paul is saying, "I want you to get along with each other, and to be likeminded." Verse 6 says that Paul hoped "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God...." God is glorified in the unity of the believers in the church. God doesn't expect us to struggle along the path of spiritual maturity all alone; He expects us to move along in the company of one another. Verse 7 says, "Wherefore, receive ye one another [don't hold anybody out], as Christ also received us [Do we have a higher standard for our group than He does?] to the glory of God." We need to be interacting. Nobody grows in a vacuum. We desperately need each other.

B. Encourage Accountability

Why do we grow by unity? I have found that the closer I am to the circle of people around me, the easier it is for me to live a righteous live because that circle holds me accountable. That circle of godly friends keep my life in their perspective. And if something isn't right, they point it out to me. That keeps me in line. I am glad that God has given me a wife and children who have high spiritual expectations of me. They force me to walk in a righteous path. If I stray out of it, one or sometimes all five of them will inform me that I am out of line.

It is very easy for a person to say, "I'm going to live my spiritual life the best way I can. I'm not going to get involved in a church, and I'm not going to have close friends. I'm the quiet type." That person is going to have a difficult time growing. When there is no accountability, there is no pressure to conform. We need the provocation of Hebrews 10:24-25 to force us into spiritual patterns.

C. Eliminate Division

God is glorified when a loving unity exists--when we love each other, serve each other, hold on to each other, and are all of one mind. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he pointed to their problem in this area: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). In verses 11-13 he goes on to say, "Cut out all of the contentions, factions, and cliques. Get together. You all need each other."

We grow faster, stronger, and more mature as we commit our lives to fellow brothers and sisters. Grow in a group, not alone. That will provide the strength and impetus you need to grow.

The final way that we glorify God is by...

XIII. USING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A. The Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts

First Peter 4:10 says, "As every man hath received the gift...." I believe that every Christian has received the gift. What is the gift? It is the area of giftedness that the Spirit of God has given to you--a combination of spiritual gifts that are blended into the unique gift that you receive. I believe that all Christians are different. We are like spiritual snowflakes. I think that the Lord combines the gifts listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 in a unique way for every believer. That gift then has a unique

manifestation and place of service within the body of Christ.

B. The Ministry of Spiritual Gifts

As you and I minister our gifts, we have a unique ministry to the body of Christ that is unequalled by anyone else. That is why each one of us is so strategic. Peter says, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth..." (1 Pet. 4:10-11). In other words, don't give out mere human wisdom if you have a speaking gift, and don't work in the flesh if you have a serving gift. Why should we speak the oracles of God? Why should we serve in the power of God? Peter says, "...that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:11). In other words, don't use your gift for your glory, but for God's.

We glorify God in the use of our spiritual gifts. As we use them by ministering to one another, we bring about the unity of the body. In that atmosphere of mutual ministry, we are stimulated to spiritual growth. Summing up our thoughts, we grow spiritually by confessing Jesus as Lord, aiming our lives at that purpose, trusting Him, bearing fruit, praising Him, praying, proclaiming the Word, and maintaining moral purity. Finally, you need to be using your spiritual gifts; you don't grow alone. You need an environment of accountability and mutual ministry to bring about the kind of growth that the Spirit of God desires in your life.

Conclusion

The Bible tells us that we are to grow; and it begins with a command. Second Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...." That's a command. You either say yes, or no. If you say, "Yes Lord. I want to mature and know the fulness of blessing. I want to comprehend You and be as useful as I can. I want to see Your power because I'm not content with the lowlands; I want to be on the peak," then live your life to God's glory. The Bible gives us a path to follow. As we follow it and are encouraged by fellow believers, we will reach spiritual maturity. That is what God desires in our lives.

A. The Result: Joy

As you and I live to the glory of God, what is the result? In Psalm 16:8-9 David said, "I have set the LORD always before me.... Therefore my heart is glad...." What is the result of living a life to the glory of God? What is the result of spiritual maturity? Joy. David's heart was glad. That is what God wants to do in our lives. The Westminster Shorter Catechism was right--it says: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." According to Ephesians 2:7, God wants to pour out His kindness on us throughout all eternity. I believe that joy is a by-product of a spiritually maturing life. I don't think that you will ever know joy unless you are growing because that is when God gives joy. Along with that comes a tremendous sense of contentment.

B. The Mandate: Glory

All of us who believe in Christ are the church of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:21 says, "Unto Him be glory in the church...." God wants to be glorified. That is the mandate. As His church, He wants us living to His glory. As we obey that mandate, He fills our lives with joy. We could be in prison, or

some other terrible circumstance, and still have a heart full of joy. In the midst of his own terrible circumstances, Paul wrote this to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). That is God's gift to the growing Christian.

C. The Hope: Christlikeness

The goal of our maturity is summed up in the words of the Apostle John: "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2). That is the ultimate end of spiritual growth. Someday, when we see Jesus, we will be like Him. Then John says, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself..." (1 Jn. 3:3). If you really believe that someday you will be like Jesus Christ, that ought to cause you to put your life in line right now and begin to live to His glory.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Define fornication. For what three reasons are Christians to avoid fornication?
2. When are we not free to exercise our Christian liberty?
3. Define the word expedient. Explain its significance to Christian liberty.
4. What is the consequence for those who commit fornication? Give some examples from the Old Testament.
5. What does the sin of fornication do to the people who commit it? (see 1 Cor. 6:12)
6. What are the three purposes that God has designed for our bodies that are perverted by sexual sin?
7. Explain man's reasoning that sexual expression is merely a natural function of the body. Respond biblically to that assertion. (see p. 6)
8. What is God eventually going to do with the body, food, and sex? (see 1 Cor. 6:13)
9. When a Christian joins himself to a harlot, what has he done to Jesus Christ? Why? (see 1 Cor. 6:15-17)
10. Why is fornication different from all other sins? What does the sin of fornication reveal about the person who committed it? (see 1 Cor. 6:18)
11. When do Christians grow faster?
12. How is God glorified by the unity of the saints? (see Rom. 15:5-7)
13. In what way does the unity of the saints help Christians to grow?

14. What problem did the Corinthians have in the area of unity? (see 1 Cor. 1:10)
15. Explain how each believer is unique in the way that God has gifted him.
16. What is the result of living to the glory of God? Support your answer.
17. What is the goal of Christian maturity? (see 1 Jn. 3:2)

Pondering the Principles

1. One of the greatest threats to a Christian's spiritual growth is the sin of fornication. According to 1 Corinthians 6:18, why is it so harmful? If you are presently involved in, or considering an extramarital or premarital affair, please take this time to examine yourself. Based on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, what is your only option if you truly desire to obey God? If you claim that God approves of your affair, how can you possibly justify that based on what He has said in His Word? Please confess your sin right now and repent from it. Ask God to strengthen your weakness in this area. If you have been considering becoming sexually involved with someone outside of marriage, flee from the situation right now (1 Cor. 6:18).
2. Are there other Christians in your life who are helping you to live a life that is glorifying to God? If not, you need someone to hold you accountable. And you need to be holding someone accountable to grow in Christ. Take this time to determine who could hold you accountable. Meet with that person to see if he or she will agree to help you along the path of spiritual maturity. Make sure that you make your life available to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. List each of the thirteen keys to spiritual growth. Based on this study, what have you learned about each of those areas of growth? Now list next to each key what you need to do in order to grow in each particular area. Keep that list in a place where you will see it every day. Now make a commitment to follow the suggestions for growth that you have recorded. Ask God to give you the wisdom to put those suggestions into practice (Js. 1:5).

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