

"Put On The New Man"

Today we will be continuing our mini-series on biblical counseling. Let's recap what we've covered so far in this series. Two weeks ago we talked about how all Christians ought to aspire to grow in their ability to biblical counsel. Last week we spoke on the importance of gathering data before offering counsel. This week we'll take the next step in counseling. If you've gathered data from a situation, how do you then go about offering counsel on how someone can make biblical changes in their life? What approach should we take? What does real change look like when people are struggling with chronic sins?

Obviously this is a big question. It's a question that will be specific to each counseling situation. Remember last week's lesson said you need to know all the details before you can give counsel to a matter. So there's no specific answer that I can give you today that will apply to each and every situation. You'll need wisdom in handling the Scriptures to address each specific case. However, there are several basic things that are going to apply in virtually every counseling case. There are certain fundamentals about our Christian growth that apply all the time.

That's what we are going to look at today. We are going to look at some general principles for approaching Christian growth. These are going to be important as you counsel yourselves or others over various struggles with sin. Now of course, the chief way we grow is through the means of God's grace: the Bible, prayer, the sacraments. And yet it's the Bible that tells us some specific ways for handling our struggles with sin. We see some of that in today's passage.

So here's what we'll consider today as we look at this passage. First, we'll look at the prerequisite for Christian growth - beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ. Second, we'll see the need for us to get to the heart of a matter; that as we deal with sin in our life, we need to address the heart level, our inner man. Third, we'll look at the scriptural method for real change in our life; the put on, put off, dynamic, described in this passage. These principles are going to help us deal with sin in our life, and they'll help us counsel others in the same way.

So, let's begin first with the prerequisite for biblical change and growth. If we are going to experience the change in our living that the Bible calls us to, there is a prerequisite. If we are going to counsel ourselves and others to real godly living, there is a prerequisite. The prerequisite is nothing less than the gospel. The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, becomes the foundation for how we can biblically change and grow. This might be a bit offensive to someone who isn't a Christian here today. I'm basically saying that you're not going to be able to really lead a godly life, apart from beginning a relationship with Jesus. Apart from becoming a Christian, you won't be able to truly grow in godliness.

You see the Bible says that before we become a Christian, we are spiritually dead. We might do things that on the surface seem "good." But true godly living needs to be done with the right motive, to serve the one true God. It

needs to be done out of true faith, believing that what you are doing is godly. And it needs to be done completely according to the right standard, God's law. If you miss on any of those points, then a deed may appear good, but it is not totally good. It's marred with sin in some way. Apart from being born again by the Holy Spirit, no one can do anything that is truly good. The prerequisite for true godly living starts with being born again; its starts with beginning a relationship with Jesus.

Just flip back to chapter 2 of this book. Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." When Jesus makes us alive by his grace, that's when we turn in faith to him. Verses 8-9 of chapter two tell us this is an act of God's grace, received by faith. That's how we begin our relationship with Jesus. We believe on him. We believe that his death on the cross was so that we could be forgiven of our sins. Flip back to our passage for today. That's what verse 32 reminds us. We were forgiven by Christ; forgiven of our sins because on the cross he paid their price. If we've turned to Jesus, we have forgiveness of all our sins, past, present, and future, and we receive the promise of eternal life.

But that's not all. Not only are we forgiven. Not only are we headed to heaven for eternity. That's all part of the gospel, but there's more. We also begin a transformation. Immediately there's a change in us. We go from being spiritually dead, to being spiritually alive. That's being born again. That new birth begins a transition in us. It's a transition that will be gradual in this life, but completed when we die and go to be with Christ in heaven. The transition is simply this. Our old way of sinful living is being put off, and being replaced with a new life from God.

You see, look at verses 17-24. This compares our old life to our new life. Physically, we are all still Gentiles. But that term is being used here to identify the nations that didn't know the true God. The description of the Gentiles given here are those who still spiritually dead, living in spiritual darkness. Gentiles, as described here, are those pagans that don't know Jesus and live for themselves in sin, instead of for God in righteousness. That's a description of who we were. But as Christians, we have a new identity. We no longer identify with the Gentiles anymore. We are no longer a part of the pagan nations. Verses 17-24 tell us that we have a new identity in Christ. This new identity comes along with a new inner self. We are made a new man in Christ.

And so the gospel is about forgiveness. Believing and trusting your life to Jesus will mean that will go to heaven when you die. But it also means that right now there's been a wonderful change in your life. You've begun a process of spiritual transformation. In this life as a Christian, you'll begin to more and more shed the old way of living off of you, and replace it with godliness and righteousness.

If you are a visitor today, that might come as a bit of a surprise to you. The media often presents a false view of Christianity. It often makes you think that Christianity teaches that your eternal destiny is dependent on how well you live godly or not in this life; that those who live a godly life, will go to heaven, otherwise you go to hell. But that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says all humans have lived an ungodly life on their own; that we are all headed to hell on our own. That's the bad news. But the good news is that we can turn to Jesus in faith. We can repent of living life apart from him. We can turn to him faith and look to follow him. If we do that, then at that point we are headed to heaven, and after that point,

that's when we begin to truly grow in godliness. In other words, the Bible says that godly living flows out of a changed heart. Those who are headed toward heaven already, because of their faith in Christ, are those who can finally begin to grow in godly living. Faith and salvation comes first, then works follow. Not the other way around. No one can earn their way to heaven. Our starting point is real faith in Christ.

So apply this to biblical counseling. It simply means that there is limited biblical counseling help you can give someone who is not a Christian. Yes, there are practical things even a non-Christian can benefit from the Bible. But the real sort of biblical counsel that you will give someone will only be achievable for the person who has begun this relationship with Christ. They need to experience the new birth and the regenerated heart to begin to live this out. In other words, if you are asked for biblical counsel from a non-Christian, the best counsel you can give them is the gospel. After they become a believer, then they have met the prerequisite for real biblical change; change that affects the insides.

That leads us to our second thing to consider today. If we are going to counsel for biblical growth we need to look to the heart. We want to seek change in our hearts. We need to counsel ourselves and others to look to our hearts. Well, let me begin by defining what I'm talking about when I mention the heart. I'm not talking about a physical organ; not the thing that pumps blood all through the body. I'm talking about our inner self. That non-physical part of us. A person is made up of body and soul. I'm not talking about the physical body, but that inner soul. What's at the root inside us that causes us to sin different sins? Biblical language gets at this inner self in different ways. Sometimes it talks about our heart or our mind. Sometimes it's described as our soul or spirit. It's the source of what animates us and drives us.

Jesus said in Mark 7 that it is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, it's what comes out of a man. Listen to what Jesus says comes out of a man in Mark 7:21. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." Do you see Jesus' point? Our problem with sin lies inside us.

This is what we see in our passage today. Look at how the Gentiles are described in verse 17. They walk in futility of mind. In verse 18, it says their understanding is darkened. It says this is both a result of ignorance and because they have hardened hearts. The description of the Gentiles, of those apart from Christ, are those who have heart problems. They are sick in their inner man. And yet verse 17 calls Christians to no longer live like those with these heart problems. The point is that this passage recognizes that Christians in this life are in an in-between point in their spiritual journey. Christ has begun the transformation in our hearts. In a real sense we can talk about having a new heart. And yet we realize that there is a part of us that still struggles with sin. There's a part of our hearts that still wants to live like that old hardened state.

Now of course, this temptation to live like our old man, is not what we've been called to as Christians. Christians have experienced a radical rebirth as we talked about in our first point today. Verse 20 says that to live in that old way is *not* the way we've learned Christ. But the point is that this recognizes that Christians will struggle with sin before we go to the Lord in

heaven. In heaven our transformation will be complete; until then God calls us to grow in godliness; to fight against this sin that still remains in us, by his power.

Well, if we are going to address sin in our lives, and in other's lives through biblical counsel, this means that we need to look to the hearts. If the inner man is the source of our sins, that's where we need to get to in our counsel of ourselves and others. In other words, our counseling needs to get to the heart of an issue; that's where real change is going to happen. You might have heard the saying, "When there's smoke, there's fire." Sometimes all we see in the midst of a horrible fire is the smoke. But if we spend time just trying to clean the smoke out of the air, we're going to be in a never ending battle. If there's smoke, we need to put out the fire. If you have a horrible oil leak in the middle of the ocean, you need to plug the leak, not just clean up the oil out of the water. You get the picture. Don't waste your time just treating symptoms when you biblically counsel. Often when you are counseling someone, they'll want to tell you about the symptoms. Find the root of the issue. The Bible says the root of sin is going to come back to the heart.

Pastor Kevin Kirby told me a good analogy here. He said if you are holding a cup of coffee, and someone bumps you, then coffee will spill out. Often we like to focus on the bump, but if you didn't have a mug full of coffee, then coffee wouldn't have spilled out in the first place. Whatever is in our mug, is what's going to spill out when we're bumped in life. If your mug is full of coffee, then coffee will spill out. If it's filled with tea, then tea will spill out; if your mug is full of bitterness, then bitterness will spill out; if it's full of envy, then envy will spill out. You get the picture. Don't let your counseling get sidetracked with just the external that stimulate someone to sin. Don't focus on the bump. Focus what's on the inside.

Often a string of "why" questions, can be helpful in getting to the heart of a matter. For example, if someone says they are angry at someone, and you ask them why, sometimes you get a surface level answer. "I'm angry at them because they bragged so much about their new job." But you might ask, "Why does that upset you?" "Because that made me feel bad that I don't have that good of a job." Well, that *might* reveal an envious spirit at the core of the person. That might be what really needs to be addressed. Again, you'll need wisdom as you help someone get to the heart of a matter.

So, let's say you get to the heart of a matter. You find some heart level issue. What do you do about it? What biblical actions can you take to combat this? Certainly you want to pray about it. God ultimately changes hearts. And yet the Bible does give some instruction for how to act against the sins you find yourselves struggling with. The method is listed here in this passage. I've described it already as the put off, put on, dynamic. We see it in verses 22 and 24. Verse 22 tells us to put off the old man. Verse 24 tells us instead to put on the new man.

In other words, as we look to change biblically, we need to stop our old sinful habits and replace them with new godly habits. We see this idea in other places in Scripture too. Colossians 3 for example, tells us to mortify what's earthly and sinful in us; and to replace it with godly things; heavenly things. You see, whenever you get rid of a sinful practice in your life, there's a void to be filled. If you don't fill that void with something, it's likely that you'll eventually resume your previous sinful

practice. Or, what's common, you'll replace it with another sinful habit. For example, that's common with people who drink too much alcohol. Often they give up alcohol and suddenly take up smoking. You see, they haven't addressed the heart of their addiction in their first place. They haven't understood what's driving them to drink, so when they stop drinking, they just replace that with a similar alternative. Instead they should find what core sinful attitude is at the heart of their drinking, deal with it, and then replace their drinking with some relevant good practice.

Jay Adams asked this question in book called *The Christians Counselor's Manual*. He asked, when is a thief, not a thief? He was commenting on this passage. He said that a thief is not a thief just when he stops stealing. That might just mean he's on a break. He might just need to run out of money again and then he'll steal again. No, he said the answer to when a thief is not a thief is right in verse 28. A thief is not a thief when they begin to regularly earn a living at a job and then begin to share his earnings with others. You see, this is the put on, put off, dynamic, in action. A thief must recognize his inner heart to gain something without having to work at it; to take from others so he himself can have more. He needs to pray to have a changed heart on this. But then he needs to put off that sinful habit of stealing and replace it with the corresponding godly habit. In this case, that is working hard at an earthly job and beginning to share with others in need. That's just simply verse 28.

This passage has several other examples of this put on, put off, dynamic as well. Verse 25, put off lying, put on speaking the truth. Verse 26, put off unresolved, sinful, anger, by not burying it, but instead deal with it right away in a godly way. Verse 29, put off corrupt communication, put on edifying speech. Verse 31, put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and put on kindness and forgiveness. See how it works? Every trait of our old man must be put off, and the godly way of our new life must be put on. This is called dehabituating and rehabituation. You put off the old sinful habit and replace it with a godly habit.

The idea in all of this is that godliness should become second nature. You see, this is what's the hard part about sin. Sin is often second nature to us. We have to recognize the bad habits and form new better ones. It can take time. Practically speaking, studies show that new habits take about 6 weeks to form. That means that for six some weeks it will seem unnatural to do your new godly habit. You'll feel a bit forced, maybe. The old habit will seem more natural. But as Christians we want to grow so that godliness is our natural response.

Take ice skating for example. Many of you are physically capable to be good ice skaters. And yet, most of you aren't. As for me, however, I can get out there, go fast, slow, backwards, and forwards, crossing over, and stop on a dime. It's frankly second nature. I don't need to think about it. I don't think about how to walk when I walk. I just do it. The same is true for my ice skating. But I wasn't born knowing how to walk, and I wasn't born knowing how to ice skate. Those are habits I had to learn. I've spent countless hours practicing my ice skating. But now I barely go ice skating, just a couple times a year. But I can still pop on those skates and it pretty much all comes right back to me. Once you learn a habit, it's hard to break it. That can be good news and bad news as we talk about all this today. But by the power of God's grace, you have the capability to overcome the sinful habits in your life, and replace them with godly ones. You won't

do this perfectly in this life. You do, however, have the capability; and you do have the call from Christ to pursue this.

And so apply all of this to biblical counseling. When you counsel someone, you will need to get practical. You need to help people discover the habitual sins in their life. You'll need to help them uncover the root of those sins. You then need to help them replace those sinful habits with the equivalent godly habits. It will take practice on their part. Sinful habits are ingrained by lots of practice. They'll be hard to break. It will be easy to pick them back up again if they don't replace them with new godly habits. The new godly habits will require practice. Paul told Timothy to train himself in godliness, 1 Timothy 4:7. We're call to work at it.

When you counsel others or yourself in this way, be prepared for the old man to try to resist. Here's a few common sinful attitudes that might show themselves when you counsel yourself or others toward biblical change. Someone might say, I can't. It's too hard. I can't change. Well, that in itself is a sinful attitude. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that no temptation is so great that we can't overcome it. That pessimistic attitude must be replaced with hope and trust and faith in God's promises. Another sinful resistance to change: someone might chronically make excuses for why they can't work on this. Again, 1 Corinthians 10:13 can be used. But really this might reveal a heart of stubbornness or rebellion. The person might not really want to change. They may have justified the sin to themselves; that it's just not that bad of a sin. They can address it another day. You'll need to confront the person with how God sees that sin and the destructive nature of it.

Another obstacle you might find in all of this is that someone doesn't make use of the means of grace. It'd be easy to think after hearing this sermon that I just have to follow a certain method and I can solve all my problems with sin. That's wrong thinking. Real change and growth as a Christian is a work of God's grace in your life. God has told us that he will give us this grace through certain means; through the Bible, through prayer, and through the sacraments. Again we've come back to this. If people aren't making use of these first and foremost, they'll have no power to put off the old and put on the new.

Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches, if a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Brothers and sisters, this is what we've been talking about all day today. When you talk about this overall subject it can sound a bit legalistic at points, when we talk about making real changes in our life to live more godly. But we are not being legalistic, because we're not talking about earning our way to heaven. What we are talking about is how the gospel transforms lives. As we trust in Christ, as we abide in Christ, Christ will bear this fruit. It's the spirit of Christ living inside you that will make you want to make these changes. Christ inside us makes all the difference.

That's what we're reminded of in the last verse today. Verse 32 tells us to put on forgiveness. Why? Because God in Christ forgave you. You see, when we talk about putting off the old and putting on the new, we're talking about putting on Christ. We put off our old man, to put on Christ. Paul said that he no longer lived, but Christ lived in him. That needs to be our confession too. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us. That's why we strive by the grace of God to put off the old and to clothe ourselves daily in Christ. When we counsel others in this way, that's all we are calling them to do as

well. Abide in Christ. Put on Christ. Live Christ. As we do, we will look to daily train ourselves in godliness, b/c Christ's spirit calls us to daily take up our crosses and follow him.

In other words, brothers and sisters, this is at the heart of the gospel - Christ saved you to transform you. Christ saved you by faith to make you a beautiful child of God who loves righteousness. Let us stay abiding in Christ; let us in faith look to put off the old and put on the new. He will give you the grace you need to do this. Amen.

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