

STUDY 23 – WHAT DEFINES YOU?

PART 2B – HOW TO CHANGE

There are two kinds of righteousness in the Bible. One is called “**imputed righteousness**”. This is where God “imputes” or credits His righteousness to you. Think of it as someone depositing \$100M into your bank account that you did not deserve. This is not something that we can merit or earn because it is God’s gift to us. It is often referred to as “**positional righteousness**” which means that when God sees you, He does not see you, but He sees Christ in you. This is your eternal position – that of having been freely given the actual righteousness of Christ. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) says it this way,

2Co 5:21 (NKJV) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It is a **judicial, legal declaration** made by God on your behalf because of the saving work of Jesus Christ, and once you are given God’s righteousness, it can never be removed. The other kind of righteousness is called “**practical righteousness**”. This is where we get to participate and grow. The theological term is “**sanctification**” and is the Greek word “*hagiasmos*”. It refers to **the ongoing process** that helps conform us to the image of Christ. What God uses to do this is His Word. [John 17:17](#) says,

Jn 17:17 (NKJV) Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Unfortunately, however, this is the one area of our Christian life where we CAN lose something. We **CANNOT** lose our salvation, justification, or adoption, but there is much to lose if we are unfaithful to God. We can fall away, backslide, live in sin, reject the work of the Holy Spirit, ignore God’s Word, disobey God, and bring God’s discipline into our life. When that happens, there is much to lose both in the present and in the future. So, here is what should be our spiritual goal and objective.

THE GOAL IS TO BRING OUR PRACTICE INTO ALIGNMENT WITH OUR POSITION.

Practical righteousness is something that must be **developed** in the believer’s life. Think of it this way.

Practical righteousness is the TARGET created for our life by God’s imputed righteousness.

Once we are saved, God wants us to always be growing, but sometimes that is more difficult than we really want it to be. However, God is so gracious and so patient and so kind that He constantly makes allowances for our struggles. We could not have a better God, a better Savior, a better hope, a better salvation than we have. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that compares to it – nothing. So, the question that we have to ask is “*Are we growing spiritually as God wants us to be growing?*”

Now, there are certain critical elements that will really help us to grow in our Christian life, and one of those elements is that of developing godly habits in our life. If we do not have or are not developing godly habits in our life, then we cannot have any legitimate expectation that we will ever grow spiritually. If I were to ask you how many godly habits you have that are helping you to become more and more Christlike, I wonder how many you think that you actually have? Could you even name them? Are you working on anything right now? One habit that I am working on is that I am trying to develop the habit that when someone interrupts me when I am talking, that I just stop talking. I am working on it really hard. I want it to be a Keystone Habit in my life. Already, it is helping me **NOT** to interrupt people when they are talking. Let me give you some keystone habits we all should be developing in our life.

1. We should be verbally encouraging people every day.
2. We should be affectionate with our spouse every day – hold hands, hug, use affectionate words.
3. We should get sufficient sleep every night, and preferably before midnight.
4. We should have a dedicated time each day when we meditate on the Word of God.¹

The fundamentals of spiritual growth never change. This is a given. The culture changes, the weather changes, life changes, but **what it takes to grow spiritually never changes**. God wants us to always be growing. So, developing godly habits is one of the keys to our spiritual growth. God will always be challenging where we are spiritually, and **there are no shortcuts to spiritual growth**. We have to go through the process of developing good habits through the practice of “**growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ**”. I have heard this called the “God process”.² I love that way of putting it – the “God process”. It is based on the truth that **God’s way is always better than my way**. Here is how this “God process” works. It is just two steps.

1. **DETERMINE** from God’s Word exactly how He wants you to live.
2. **DEVELOP** godly habits to reinforce what you have determined.

Determine / Develop – very simple. If you make the Christian life complicated, then you will miss it.

KEEP EVERYTHING SPIRITUAL IN YOUR LIFE VERY SIMPLE.

Whatever you want to achieve in your spiritual life, never make it complicated. Make it **simple, achievable, measurable**. Do simple godly things over an extended period of time and it will soon become a godly habit. If what you are wanting to do spiritually is complicated, then it will not work. Here is a very short list of small things to do over a period of time. Be kind to people, get good rest, be a good steward of your time, be forgiving, be gracious, help whenever you can, be a servant, get proper exercise, love your family – you get the picture. All of these are simple and each one of them are a part of “God’s process”. Think of it this way.

Just develop the habit of doing what is right and good, and then leave the results to God.

Now, I have a goal in these series that I have been doing for the last couple of years. I know that the ministry that God has given to me is NOT designed to entertain you, but to help you make godly choices and develop godly habits in your life. Church cannot just become an information transfer. I want you to have a godly plan and strategy to grow spiritually so that you can obtain the results that God wants you to achieve. Research indicates that developing a good habit in our life, if it is done properly, only takes about three weeks to accomplish. It also indicates that 95% of everything that we do or achieve is because of a learned habit. I am on autopilot when it comes to brushing my teeth or putting on my seat belt or turning on the coffee as soon as I get up in the morning. I do not even think about these things. I just do them. Everybody that I know that is spiritually successful in their life has great habits. I would emphasize it this way. **It is those Christians with really good habits that separate the successful, exceptional Christian from the non-successful, indifferent, apathetic Christian**. Here is a very important principle. This is so super important.

¹ Groeschel, Guide, ep.

² Groeschel, Guide, ep.

The more you REPEAT an activity, the more AUTOMATIC that behavior becomes over time.³

The problem that I have as your pastor is that I believe that you already know what needs to change in your life to become what God wants you to become. It is not like you need a lot more information on what may be right or wrong in your life. If all that we needed was information, then anyone with a computer could live in a mansion, have abs of steel, be the healthiest creature on the planet, and be as rich as they could imagine. So, more information is not the issue. **The issue is that most Christians need a plan, a process, a strategy, a methodology that will help them to become Christlike.** We all have some good habits and some bad habits in our life. Unfortunately, the problem with bad habits is that they always sabotage your good habits and neutralize your spiritual growth and success.⁴ For instance, if you are working really hard on an area like anger, but one day in a fit of frustration you go ballistic, then all of the good work that you were working on is sabotaged, and you lose ground in your battle with anger. Here is what I want you to understand. This is the heart of this message today.

Your habits and choices only become meaningful when you connect them to your CORE values.

Our core values are what drive us, what motivate us. **Our core values DEFINE us.** They define who we are and what we do. They mark us out. They are the things that we believe the most and that we are committed to the most. So, what we want to do is to **connect our choices and habits to our core values.** If we do that, then we will be much more successful in sustaining a good choice and developing a great habit. One of my core values is that I want to love my wife like Christ loves the church. It is embedded in me so deep that I am constantly looking for ways to improve in this area. My wife means everything to me. Loving her like Christ loves the church is a core value of my life. So, I have developed good habits connected to that core value. I open all of the doors for her. I put all of the groceries in the car and I take all of the groceries out. I help wash the dishes and clean up the kitchen after a meal. I try and clean up after myself. I do not want her lifting anything heavy. I want our home to be as comfortable for her as possible. These are good habits in my life. I do not actually think about doing them. My rule is simple: **I do not want my wife doing anything that I can do for her.** That drives me, defines me.

Now, what I want you to do is to write down on a sheet paper that I will give you what you believe is your one greatest core value. There is no right or wrong answer, but in reality, what you write down should be what you believe is the greatest core value in your life. Many Christians have never clearly defined their core values. After you write yours down, then I will tell you what my deepest core value is and see how closely aligned that we are. Now, I beg you not to write down something just to please me or the person sitting next to you. In fact, you may not even be able to identify what your core values are. If that is the case, then just be honest and put down “*I don’t know what my core values are.*” If you just make one up, then it has no value. You learn nothing. Your core values have to be the things in your life that drive you, motivate you, challenge you, change you, but eventually you have to determine if they are in alignment with what God wants your core values to be. If they are not, then you will need to change them. For instance, a lost person’s core value might be to make all of the money that they can, or to become a professional athlete, or to own a lot of land. However, I am not sure that any of those would qualify as being **BIBLICAL** core values. I would say they are worldly core values, and they may

³ Hardy, 54.

⁴ Hardy, xxxii.

actually lead you away from God. So, please be honest and transparent. Hopefully, this will help you to identify and quantify what your spiritual core values should be.

My driving core value is that **I want to become more and more like Christ every day.** In my life today, this is the one core value that drives me more than anything else. This is me trying to love God with all of my heart and mind and soul and strength. This core value drives my choices, drives my decisions, and drives the development of godly habits in my life. I also want to give you one of my other core values. This core value means everything to me because what our core values do is that they actually simplify our life. **It is much easier to make a decision when I know what I want my life to exemplify.** I.e., is what I am about to do or decide in alignment with my core values? Here is one of my major core values. **I want to always focus on my spiritual growth, spiritual excellence, and spiritual influence.** I want my life to make a difference, but I know that cannot happen if I am not growing, not excelling, and not impacting other people's lives. The Christian life goes far beyond just reading our Bible and coming to church. Those are great values and they should characterize every devoted follower of Christ, but growing spiritually, excelling spiritually, and becoming a godly influence in other people's lives is what makes you a disciple and a committed follower of Christ. If you are not making the kind of spiritual progress in your life that you should be making, I would say it is because you may not have clearly defined spiritual goals in your life. Many Christians have no spiritual target for their life, and in the end, they have nothing to hit.

Our core values are what I want to call our “**spiritual compass**”, our internal compass. Think of your core values as your spiritual GPS. They are what define you and what you ultimately stand for in your life. One very important aspect of our core values is that **they should always serve as the filter through which we evaluate everything in our life.** We have to ask ourselves this question – “*Is this activity, this choice, this person, this habit in alignment with my core values?*” Just think about Jesus. He is our perfect example. This is what He told His disciples in **John 6:38**,

Jn 6:38 (NKJV) For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

This was Jesus' core value – to always do what He knew His Father wanted Him to do. It drove every decision, every choice, every word, every part of His life, every day in His life. It was God's will and not His will that drove His life, and that should be one of our core values – to always be doing what we know God wants us to do. I encourage you to simply take some time this week and write down what are your core values. It may tell you more about your life than you actually want to know, but it will be good for you. You must connect your decisions, choices, and habits to your core values if you ever want to be spiritually successful. **If you have the wrong values, then you will always get the wrong results.**

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