

Paul tells the Ephesians to let the Spirit renew their thoughts and attitudes. This means more than stopping bad behavior, it involves a change in perspective, applying God's viewpoint to whatever it is that is tripping you up. Paul describes it as putting on the new nature, like deciding what clothes to wear. Will we continue to wear our old nature, or will we put on Christ being indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

How do you know when you are merely changing your outward behavior versus when you allow the Holy Spirit to take root in you and change your mind and attitudes? Can you recognize the difference?

25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. ... 28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. 29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. 30 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. - Ephesians 4:25, 28-32 NLT

Paul provides some indicators of changed lives using opposing pairs. What similarity do you find in all of the beneficiaries of godly behavior? Think of a behavior where you'd like to apply an "opposing pair"? Now pause to invite God to reign over that area of your life.

WRAP-UP

As your desire and commitment to follow Jesus grow, you may begin to wonder why the struggle with sin still remains even after salvation and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Temptation comes from the devil, the influence of the world, and your own sinful nature, but through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can resist those influences and continue growing in holiness. Through initial sanctification, God justifies you, gives you new life, and adopts you into His family. Yet He also continues His transforming work through entire sanctification, shaping your heart, renewing your mind, and drawing you into deeper surrender and Christlike living. As you put off your old nature and put on your new life in Christ, God continues to transform your attitudes, desires, and actions so you can live more fully for Him

MEMORY VERSE

7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. - Romans 6:7-8 NLT

Challenge – Take time to pray and intentionally consecrate every area of your life so that God can clothe you in His righteousness.

The More Excellent Way- Week 4 Sin And the Battle to Be Holy

INTRODUCTION

As our desire and commitment to following Jesus grows, we will likely ask ourselves this question, "If I'm saved and filled with the Spirit, why do I still struggle with sin?" The battle between sin and holiness will be with you to some degree as long as you walk this earth. But rather than denying it exists or attempting to appear "holy" to those around us, we can take steps to make progress in our sanctification that will lead us nearer to God and farther from sin. Let's consider how we fight this battle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Ice Breaker

When you pick out your clothes for the day, what is the most important consideration for your selection? (e.g. comfort, what others will think, how it makes you feel...)

Key Passage

17 With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. - Ephesians 4:17-22 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Devil, the World, and the Flesh

The temptation to sin is real, but where does it come from. We can identify three specific sources, or entry points for sin into our lives. The first is our enemy, the devil. You may be reluctant to see Satan as a valid threat. But if you are a Christian, you should already believe in spiritual beings (i.e. Holy Spirit). And because the Bible clearly considers Satan and his minions are real, so should we.

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. - 1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV

Experiencing temptation is not the same as sinning. Peter tells us to resist and stand firm. Temptation is like a circling bird, but it is not sin. Sin is when you invite temptation to build a nest and settle in.

Having a strong faith is critical in resisting the enemy's attacks. Who are the people in your life, or the practices in your daily rhythm, that do the most to strengthen your faith in Jesus? Can you share an experience that you believe was spiritual warfare?

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. - Romans 12:2 NIV

The second area where sin gains a foothold is through "the world". This refers to current or popular culture that promotes a manner of thinking in rebellion or apart from God. The culture around us presses in on us in a way that can shape how we think and act.

What is Paul's instruction to prevent being conformed the patterns of this world? What is the result we can expect when we do?

Renewal is the renovation or improvement of our moral and spiritual vision. The source of that renewal is the Holy Spirit. The ultimate test of our success is found when we live a way that is aligned with God's will.

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. - Romans 6:6-7 NIV

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. - James 1:13-15 NIV

The third source of temptation is "the flesh" or our old nature. In Romans 6:6-7 Paul says we have crucified the flesh. But James says our evil desires still attempt to "drag us away" from God. When those evil desires resurface, we need to recognize them and refuse to be dragged away to serve them again, essentially, we are nailing them to the cross.

The challenge we face is that our declaration of freedom is disconnected from working out this reality in our everyday lives. We still have battles to face and a part to play in our journey to holiness.

2. Initial and Entire Sanctification

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In Ephesians 4 Paul warns us to live distinctly from the non-believers who let sin take them wherever it leads them. We once lived that way, but let's leave that entirely behind us. In verse 22 Paul says to "cast off" the old nature which is corrupted. Holiness by definition means to be set apart for God's purposes and so we can't blend our old ways with our new life in Christ. Instead, we live by these truths Jesus teaches:

- We are Justified

22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. 23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. - Romans 3:22-24 NLT

All of our guilt and its penalty have been removed from us. What did we do to receive this gracious gift?

- We are Regenerated- given a New Life

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! - 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

God has made us spiritually alive and capable of faith, love and obedience. Can you share the circumstances and the story of when you repented, and turned your life over to Jesus as Lord, and began your New Life?

- We've been Adopted by God

12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn--not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. - John 1:12-13 NLT

When God saved us, it was not to be His servants or even the subjects of His kingdom. The astounding truth is that we became His Children! Take a moment to reflect on the love and generosity God revealed when He made you His child and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for that incredible gift.

Our justification, regeneration and adoption begin our holiness journey with our "Initial Sanctification". But God has more for us. The more time you spend in God's presence, the more you will desire to draw closer still. This divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple demonstrates the Holy Spirit's continued perfecting work of "Entire Sanctification". We must nurture that desire and partner with God in whole-hearted commitment and surrender to Him.

3. Put on Your New Nature

23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God--truly righteous and holy. - Ephesians 4:23-24 NLT