

How Believers Change and Grow

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Galatians 5:16-26 describes the daily struggle that every believer is engaged in---**a war between the flesh and the Spirit.**

I. WHAT IS THE DRIVING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FLESH?

- A. The flesh is driven by the goal of gratification of sinful desires. (V. 16-17).
- B. Note the list Paul gives in verses 19-21. At the base of all of these is the goal of fulfilling human wants and passions.
- C. Verse 17 says that this approach to life sets up a conflict with the Spirit.
- D. How do we know when our desires conflict with the Spirit? See John 14:16-17 and John 17:17.

II. WHAT IS THE DRIVING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SPIRIT?

- A. The Spirit-controlled man is one who has his fallen mind renewed with biblical truth and regularly decides with his will to act on that truth. (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23-24)
 1. The example of suffering in I Peter 1:3-15. Peter calls upon them to deal with severe trials by thinking not feeling.
- B. Each of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 requires understanding biblical truth about that fruit and making a decision of the will to act on that truth.
 1. Example: Is love an emotion or thinking and acting biblically? (See John 3:16; James 2:15-16; I John 3:16-18).

III. HOW THEN DO BELIEVERS CHANGE AND GROW?

- A. By first understanding God's purpose. (Rom. 8:28-29).
 1. God's purpose is that we be growing and changing to become like Jesus Christ in our thinking and behavior.
 2. This is why Christ has left behind "Body #2."
 - a. Who is "Body #1"? (See John 1:14).

HOW BELIEVERS CHANGE AND GROW, Page Two:

- b. Who is "Body #2"? (See I Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:18).
 - c. Why? (Eph. 4:11-16).
 - B. By understanding the need for God's power. (Gal. 5:16).

1. The Christian life cannot be lived in the energy of the flesh.
 2. We must realize the importance of the spiritual disciplines.
 - a. The need to feed on the Word. (I Pet. 2:1-3).
 - b. Prayer---communion with God resulting in peace. (Phil. 4:4-7).
 - c. The local Church---(Heb. 10:24, the whole New Testament).
- C. By understanding God's process.
1. The Put-off/Put-on dynamic and how it works. (Eph. 4:22-24).
 - a. The old man is desire-driven/feeling-oriented. (Eph. 4:22).
 - b. The new man is truth/principle-driven. (Eph. 4:24).
 - c. This change occurs by the renewing of the mind. (Eph. 4:23).
 - d. Knowledge of the Word is required. (Rom. 12:2; John 17:17).
 - e. Biblical growth is life transformation resulting from a knowledge of Biblical principles. (Rom. 12:2).
 - f. Sinful habits are addressed through a deliberate strategy of carrying out Biblical principles in daily life. Christlikeness does not develop by accident.
 - g. No matter how stubborn the habit, the flesh can be rehabitated with Biblical truth by the power of the Spirit.
 - h. It is crucial that we not merely put-off. We must also put-on. In other words, it is not enough to cease sinful behavior. We must replace it with righteous behavior. To leave a vacuum results in reverting to the old habit worse than before (Luke 11:24-26).

HOW BELIEVERS CHANGE AND GROW, Page Three:

- i. Help the counselee understand that the first few weeks in changing any habit is war! However, the battle will lessen if they persevere. Many quit during the first few weeks because they believe that it will always be this hard. Give them hope by helping them understand that the struggle will lessen as the godly habit takes hold.
2. A proper response to the consequences of sin. (Gen. 4:6-7; Ps. 51).
3. Proper handling of trials. (I Pet. 1:6-7—God knows that some things can only be learned through suffering).
4. Solving conflicts biblically. (Matt. 18:15-18; I John 1:9; James 5:16).

CONCLUSION:

It is God's will that believers be growing and changing into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). There is no growth without knowledge of the Word of God. But this knowledge is not to be a mere intellectual exercise. The renewing of the attitude of our minds is with a view to application of the Word to daily living, resulting in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:23-24). As counselees make progress, encourage them! Share with them examples of others who have conquered difficult habits. God can help them do so, too! Design homework that is simple and clear, focusing on ways that they can see progress immediately. This will excite them and encourage them to stay with the process of change that God wants them to make. Remind them that the flesh will rear up its ugly head from time to time. They should not be discouraged by this, but deal with it Biblically when it occurs and get right back to pursuing godliness. Use Jay Adams' booklet Godliness Through Discipline as a homework tool for explaining this process.