

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11

1. The Puritans often prayed prayers that involved self-deprecation or confessing to God their short-comings, failures and weaknesses.
2. While confessing such things to God is important it is also important to recognize and give God glory for the work of grace He has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish in our lives.
3. Some time ago I wrote the following in my journal:
“In our desire to manifest humility we sometimes fail to give God credit for the progress He has made in our lives. We often speak of our failures and short-comings while ignoring the fact that we are not the person we once were. How can we say that God is at work in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure if there is no progress?”
4. Always talking about what miserable wretches we are does little to encourage ourselves and others to believe that spiritual progress is both possible and to be expected.
5. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that he had **formerly** been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent man (violently arrogant). I Timothy 1:13
NOTE: Formerly is an important word because it holds great promise. What has been true does not need to continue to be true.
6. Our lives have three phases; what we once were, what we presently are, and what we are in the process of becoming.
7. The passage before us deals with the first two phases.

I. What we once were.

A. We were sinners who had no hope of inheriting the kingdom of God.

NOTE: There is a warning here for professing Christians who practice sin.

1 John 3:4-10

4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

B. Paul made it clear that those he described in verses 9-10 will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

NOTE: Paul mentioned both natural and unnatural forms of sexual sin. The pagan religious practices in Corinth included both male and female prostitution along with natural and unnatural forms of sexual sin.

C. Paul included similar lists in some of his other letters.

1. Gal 5:19-21

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and **things like these**, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

2. Eph 5:1-5

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 **For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

D. **AND SUCH WERE (PAST TENSE) SOME OF YOU!**

II. What we presently are.

A. In spite of what we were God demonstrated His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

B. When we repented towards God and embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord God washed us, sanctified us (set us apart), and justified us.

C. We became new creatures in Christ. 2 Cor 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (creation); the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

1. Ps 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

2. Isa 38:17 (King Hezekiah)

"Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness; it is You who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”

3. Heb 8:10-12

"FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."

D. Our bodies became members of Christ. 6:15

E. Our bodies became temples of the Holy Spirit. 6:19-20

F. We became children of God. 1 John 3:1-3

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be

like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 **And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

III. What we are in the process of becoming.

A. Paul wrote the following to the Philippians, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (1:6) ...for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure (2:13).”

B. Note the following:

1. God’s will. Rom 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for **good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image (likeness, representation) of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

NOTE: Paul wrote that Jesus was the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), and he went to write that we have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created (us). (Colossians 3:19)

NOTE: You and I are to be the image (likeness) of the invisible Christ.

2. God’s work. Heb 12:7-11

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our **good**, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

3. God’s word. 2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

NOTE: Putting all of these verses together how can we claim to be a child of God if there is no spiritual progress taking place?

APPLICATION

1. We are to actively cooperate with God in all aspects of the Christian life.

2. If we do our part spiritual progress will be evident and ongoing. Phil 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

3. We do what we do because of what God has done and is doing. 2 Peter 1:5-11

Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence**, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

4. Something is wrong if God's priorities are not our priorities.