



GROW 102

HOW?

We have discussed *why* we should behave as Christians (our vocation as rulers and priests, something I am fairly sure no one reading this really feels qualified to do), and now we are going to discuss *how* we can accomplish that vocation.

Even though it may seem like we are putting the cart before the horse, it is quite intentional that we discuss the “how” before the “what.” I believe it is imperative that we understand the process of becoming fully human before we actually address the behaviors that reflect full humanity, lest we become discouraged at our apparent lack of progress.

Most of us will admit we need to grow and change. We know we're not perfect. Still, we fear change because we don't know what life will be like afterward. Will the change be good or bad? We especially resist other people's attempts to change us. Tell me it doesn't scare you a little to hear someone say, “God wants to change your life.” Seriously, that can produce more fear than joy. But even if we can agree that his intentions are for us to become fully human, to reign with him, this may generate even more fear. This is when we begin to wrestle with HOW we will do it. We wonder *what* God will expect us to do, but first we wonder *how*.

This quest for the “how” returns us, naturally, to the end of GROW 101, where we found Jesus suggesting we be perfect (*teleios*), and where we learned that, by perfect, he meant whole, complete, fully human. As Jesus' chief Apostle (like a senior disciple or one of Jesus' most devoted followers) to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people), Paul wrestles with this term.

Paul was a Jewish scholar who came to believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (the one who would rescue the world). Now, at long last, it appeared that

the created order God had in mind from the beginning has burst forth, bringing all things under Jesus' subjection, And Jesus' followers were to rule as his agents in the world. This new situation is the “perfect” or fully human existence for which we were designed.

So, if that is so. Why can we look around at other Christ followers (or in the mirror for that matter) and see imperfect behavior? Why do we see people ignoring the commands of Jesus to love God and love others? Why do we often seem to be no different from those who have not been introduced to the kingdom of God? This is another great question that Paul addresses head-on.



*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made **perfect**, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

~ *Philippians 3:12-14*



Considering the following words from the passage above – *press on, take hold, straining, goal, prize* – what are some things you can say about becoming fully human?

IDOLS

There seems to be a connection between our seeking after the counter-intuitive qualities of kingdom (rule and priesthood through meekness, humility, and peacemaking) and becoming complete or whole. This begs the question, “What is this goal Paul is stretching so hard for?” He says he has not attained perfection, or

rather he is not yet complete, but he's straining for it. One thing that we can be certain of is that it doesn't just happen. This is a process that involves choices and effort, successes and failures.

Read Matthew 19:16-22 again. How like the rich young man are we? How often do we come before Jesus and say, "Look what I have done. Am I worthy yet? What good thing must I do?" And how do we like Jesus' answer? He basically says that it isn't about the good things we do. We can do good things all day long, but there's something more – something different.

And we know it. We recognize something is missing. Like the rich young man, we come before Jesus asking the question we *think* we want him to answer, "What's still missing?" But when he answers, we discover a fundamental disconnect between theory and reality. As long as we have an abstract checklist to work from – do this; don't do that – we are good. That is the theory. But the reality is something deeper. And when we learn the reality, we hang our head. "Not that, Lord. Not my money. Not my cigarettes. Not my lottery tickets. Not my job. Not my family. Not my ministry."

But what is the reality? Is it just about giving those things up? Is it that Jesus doesn't want us to be successful? To have things? To enjoy our lives? No, that's not it. In fact, in John 10:10, Jesus says he came into the world to give us a full life. He is not a cosmic killjoy. Let's look at what Jesus said to this young man:

First, Jesus tells the young man he must keep the commandments. When he asks which ones, Jesus lists strictly behavioral commands – don't steal, lie, or commit adultery, love others – do this; don't do that. I think Jesus did this because he knew the young man would say, "No sweat." But the young man knew there was something more, just like we do. And he was right. So when he asks, "What else?" Jesus says, "Oh, yeah. There's the first two – 'I have to be your only God,' and 'You won't bow down to anything else.'"

"Wait," you say, "When did he say that?"

This is what Jesus is telling him when he says, "Sell everything and give it to the poor. Then follow me." He

is saying you can do the right things all day long, but if your heart is not right, it doesn't matter; if you put other "gods" before God, that is idolatry, and it is your heart undermining God's order. The problem was not what he was doing or not doing; it was about the condition of his heart. Jesus wanted us to see something profound in this exchange – your behavior matters, but following Jesus is about turning your life upside-down. It's about what you put first. It's about your heart and your mind.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ~ Matthew 6:21



Where is your treasure? What would you have trouble giving up if Jesus commanded it of you?

TRANSFORMED

Fortunately, Jesus doesn't expect all of us to immediately drop everything that is holding us back and distracting us before we can follow him. Instead, he expects us, like Paul, to strain for it. Right after he calls us to be a royal priesthood, Paul adds more insight...

*Do not conform any longer 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*

Here, Paul's suggestion to "renew your mind" is not an intellectual or academic pursuit; it is not about studying more or getting a theology degree. But instead it means that if we begin to think in a different way, that thinking will transform us into something new – something that is new and different.



What would constitute new thinking – the kind that transforms you? How do you think this relates to the heart?

Paul preaches the renewing of the mind and the direction of the heart (*Romans 10:10 - ...it is with your heart that you believe and are justified*), but still struggles.

...I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do: no. the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. ~ Romans 7:18-19



Do passages like the one above make you feel better or worse about the prospect of you developing real Christian character?

When we read passages like the one above, we understand in some intellectual way that we are incapable of working ourselves into the good graces of God. Even Paul struggles to do right. But obsessing over this is, at best, counter-productive, and at worst, a sin. Again Paul...

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!
~ 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ~ Romans 8:1-2

Do these passages seem to be describing someone else besides you? “I don’t *feel* new or free” you say. But neither did Paul, and he wrote them. It would be dreadful misreading to suggest that these passages condemn anyone who does not “feel” new. Paul says there is NO condemnation for you. He is stating a *fact* not a *feeling*. Renewal comes through Jesus’ resurrection and he lives in you through his Spirit. But he never promises smooth sailing. There will be struggle.

This might seem an occasion for despair, but instead, it is a cause for hope. Consider this. Maybe the whole thing is not about following the rules but something more. Maybe becoming fully human is a process rather than some kind of miraculous reversal. Can we be in the kingdom and still be a work-in-progress?

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ~ Hebrews 12:11-12

...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. ~ Romans 5: 4-5

Remember in GROW 101 we said that we find our hope in our vocation, our call to be fully human citizens of God’s kingdom, and here Paul tells us that, under the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we may suffer and struggle, we can achieve our hope by persevering to the point where we develop character. This may well be the most important passage in all of Paul’s writing, because it gives us the key to unlock all of the rest of Paul’s doctrine (which is really Jesus’ doctrine).

We are **saved and called**, new creatures **empowered by the Spirit** of Jesus, **enabled** through our perseverance and his power **to become fully human** and fulfill our destiny as rulers and priests in a new kingdom unlike any other. Awesome.



What does it feel like knowing you’ve been given a new chance at life every day from now until eternity?

SO FAR:

We should P _____ O _____, T _____ H _____,
and S _____ toward the G _____.

The new kingdom is U _____ - D _____.

New life in Christ is a F _____ not a F _____.

We can become fully human one G _____ C _____
at a time.