

Why Am I Not Growing in Holiness as I Ought?

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Date: 20 July 2014

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[0:00] Is holiness possible? Last week we saw that what does progress look like? And today we're going to ask the question which I think logically follows from those two ideas and that is why am I not growing in holiness as I ought?

If holiness is possible, if progress is possible, then maybe the question, and I think all of us need to ask this question to some degree or other, maybe some more, maybe some less, but if holiness is possible, if progress is possible, then maybe this question that we need to ask ourselves is why am I not growing as I should?

If we had a plant or a pet or a child, something that was supposed to grow, but it wasn't growing, we would ask, what's wrong here? What needs to change? What's not right?

Right. And holiness is a plant that should grow. It's a living reality, and so it should grow. Progress is not only possible, it's expected. It's the norm.

And so if there is no progress, or if there's so very little progress, if we're staying the same, there's no growth, I think we need to sit down and ask ourselves, what's wrong here? What's keeping my growth from happening?

[1:34] And so today I'm going to give you five reasons. Five reasons why people don't grow as they should. And again, these are not exhaustive. I'm sure you could come up with more than what I've come up with, but I think these are probably the most common, and they're probably the most broad.

So a lot of things would fit under these five. So five reasons, again, why I'm not growing as I ought. And reason number one is, I secretly think I don't really have to grow.

So reason number one, I secretly think I don't really have to grow. Growth is really not necessary. And again, this is not, as so many things, this is not something that we're going to say out loud, or very rarely are we going to admit to this thought.

But I secretly think I don't really have to grow. I'm saved, right? I've got grace, I'm going to heaven. And so it really doesn't matter if I grow. If I have what it takes to get into heaven.

Growth is nice, but it's completely optional. After all, we're saved not by our works, we're saved by grace. And so I don't have to work for my salvation, and so therefore I don't really have to grow.

[3:07] If God has given me what I need, this perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ, then I don't need to grow. Now, do Christians think that way?

Yeah, sometimes we do. And it shows itself, it bears, it shows that what's going on there by a stunted life of holiness. They don't grow like they ought, because they don't think they really need to.

And so when they look at people who are striving for holiness, who are passionately straining for it, they say, well, that's nice. That's good. That's admirable.

But that's not really necessary. They might scratch their head and say, if we're going to heaven, I don't see what the urgency is. I don't see why to put all that work in if I have already what it takes to get to heaven.

Now, let me ask you, what's wrong with that kind of thinking? Anything? What's wrong with that kind of thinking? Jackie?

[4:13] Jason, can that be a saved person, thinking that way as a matter of life? I think... Can you think that's a saved person? Because without holiness, no one will see no more.

I wouldn't want to say I would know if that person's saved or not. I would definitely say that is not a healthy Christian. I think it's someone who... I mean, could we have...

Could we say, yeah, maybe they have the heart of the matter in them, but their thinking is extremely confused? I guess that's as far as I would want to go. There is definitely some problems there.

And I think there is definitely some overlap between someone who is just saved in testimony or in profession, but not really saved in life.

I guess I say that because I think our kids are running into other kids who have taken on, I have God, I don't have holiness. I don't care about sin, but I have God.

[5:17] Yeah. And that's scary to think that that's a saved person. Yeah. I guess I wouldn't want to say that in every case that is a saved person.

I would definitely take it case by case, and I wouldn't want to judge just infallibly. I would at least want to say if that is a Christian, there is something very wrong with that thinking.

The heading of your message is that why we're not growing as we should. And as a subset of that, I think it assumes that we are Christians.

We do have some holiness, but we're not as zealous for it as we ought to be. That would indicate that there is some life there. Yeah. But if the issue is I have God and I have no holiness, and the characteristic of my life is that holiness is not there, it's not on the radar, it's not in my pursuit at all, then that's another issue, isn't it?

Yeah. I guess. So to have, I mean, you're talking about it, we're not growing in holiness as we should. That assumes that there is growth in holiness, but it's not.

[6:37] And so the life, the root of the matter is there. But there can still be something of this thinking that, you know, I've got enough. Yeah. Enough to be convinced that I'm going to heaven and not to make it in pursuit.

Yeah. There. There. There. Back to what Jackie said, what an opportunity to share something like, well, so when you're a cultural Christian, not a biblical Christian, and raise a question, then hopefully God will plant those seeds and make them start living.

Yeah. I guess, yeah, I don't, I would want to say that that is the context of, the question is, is it possible for Christians to at least to some extent believe lies?

Yeah. Yeah. But if it's a lie that predominates and controls your life completely, then I'm really questioning whether they're a Christian if the root of the matter is in them.

Yeah. Yeah. If somebody who, you know, takes their faith nonchalantly and is acting like that, I would ask them, do you love Jesus? And of course, they would say, well, of course I love Jesus.

[7:53] And then with that, I would say, well, you know, the word says in the Gospel of John, if you love me, that Christ said, you'll obey my commandments, he says it three times in a row.

And we've got a whole life's work there because we'll never obey perfectly. There's always something to work on. Yeah. I think, I guess there is definitely something wrong with that thinking. That's clearly, it's not a healthy state. It's definitely sinning at the expense of grace or allowing sin to live in you at the expense of grace.

Now, that person might to some degree have understood the Gospel. Maybe to some, they have believed the Gospel. But I think in the heart of the matter is that it's still a very legal way of thinking. And I guess this is what I mean. When God's grace really overpowers and enters into your heart and your mind, I'm not necessarily saying that you're not saved.

[9:08] But when it comes in with an extreme convincing and understanding, you don't calculate the same way that you once did.

And this is what I mean. The flesh calculates like this. Well, what do I need to do? What's the bare minimum that I need to do in order for God to be satisfied with me? Where's the line that I need to cross?

What's the threshold I need to get over? And it's, well, I need to obey. And so I'll obey. Now, not because I love obedience, not because God loves righteousness, but because that's what it takes. That's legalism at its heart. That I don't love God's law for itself. I love it because, or I'll try to obey it because I want to get into heaven.

I want to cross that threshold. I want to do the bare minimum. And then they either discover that that law is so high that they can't keep it or something else happens and they give up or they become a very self-righteous person.

[10:16] But when the gospel comes in and says, Jesus has obeyed for you, and Christians can really believe that, and as Christians, they can really believe that, and they can take that and they can think, well, there you go.

So something happens in their thinking. They say, well, there you go. I couldn't obey. So he obeyed for me. That's settled. I'm going to heaven. Now, what needed to happen has happened.

I've crossed the line. I've gotten over the threshold. There's no more for me to do except to wait to go to heaven. Now, again, this is a spectrum.

Sometimes Christians fall into these things where they're still very much bound by this legal way of thinking, even though God has brought them into a newness of life.

And so this is not the all that there is, but maybe this is a part of what there is. And so they're still thinking in this fleshly, legal way.

[11:26] And so they look at God primarily as just a judge who is now satisfied. And they rejoice in that. They rejoice in their justification.

But they don't see God as a father, God as a king. They don't feel so much God's wonderful love and affection for them. And so grace hasn't so transformed their hearts that they're not just obeying because I want to keep God happy with me or I'm obeying because that's what I have to do.

They're not obeying because I want to, because God has loved me. I guess what I'm trying to say is there is growth in the Christian life.

And as we grow, grace more and more captures us and catches us. And so we stop asking, what's the bare minimum? The gracious heart doesn't think that way.

Even if growth wasn't necessary, which it is, but even if growth wasn't necessary, that gracious heart would still say, I want to be like God. I want to obey God because, like Roger said, if you love me, you'll obey my command.

[12:46] So I love you. I want to please you. I want to make you happy. The gracious heart would still say, I don't want to sin because sin is against God. It's not calculating in a legal way like that anymore.

And so it's not because of some bare minimum that needs met. It's because he loves me. And I want to please him because he so loved me.

And he has been so perfect to me. And so I want to be perfect for him. I want to please him. And so if you're not growing like you ought, maybe you need to check, is this lie found a place in your heart where you're saying, well, you know, God, I'm good.

I have everything that I need. So I don't have to grow. Well, that's misunderstanding. And that's thinking too little of what Jesus has done for you.

And it ends up with you not working and striving and straining for holiness like you ought. So that's the first thing.

[13:56] The second reason, why am I not growing in holiness like I ought? I lack assurance. I'm full of doubts. I lack assurance. Um, so some people in their weak faith, in their struggle to believe in God's goodness and grace for them, it leads them to, um, I don't want to say this absolutely, but it leads them to, to never get around to, to growing in holiness.

And this is what I mean. Imagine a builder and, or maybe not never getting around to growing in holiness, just maybe never making much progress at it, never having enough time or energy to devote to it.

And this is what I mean. Imagine a builder and he's, he's laid the foundation for his house, but he's always second guessing himself whether he did that foundation, uh, correctly.

Will the foundation hold? Is this really the right foundation for the house that I want to build? Did I do this correctly? He's always wondering, will the foundation hold me or not?

Well, he lays the foundation. And then he, he gets some two by fours and he's going to build his walls. He's going to start, uh, building up his house.

[15:13] But so his, his lumber's there. He's ready to build. He has all of his tools. And, and then he starts looking again at the foundation and I was going to work on the walls this day, but he starts second guessing the foundation.

Will it really hold this house? And so he goes back to the blueprint and he measures again and he looks over the matter again. He does some tests. He walks around it again and again. And he, he says, yes, this foundation will hold.

And so he's finally, he's pretty sure that he's done it right. The foundation is in place. And so the next day he comes to work and he does start building the walls. He starts really putting up walls, but there he is.

He has his walls up and he's, and he, now he's ready to put on the, the roof. And then that question starts bugging him again. Did I do this foundation right? Will it hold?

And he's so full of doubt. He's sure it won't hold. And, but he, he is, he's just torn between two opinions. And so he tears down the walls or he leaves them half built and he starts looking again at the foundation and he's doing the testing of it.

[16 : 23] And, and, and then he starts again on the walls and he starts building up, but then he has to go back and look again and again and again and around and around he goes.

Um, that's what I mean by, because of a lack of assurance, you don't make the progress in building on the foundation like you should.

And that seems to be something of what was going on in the book of Hebrews. They were questioning the foundation of Jesus Christ again. And so the author says, therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and, and faith in God, et cetera.

Now, let me ask you, do we ever stop repenting and believing? No. So in one sense, do we ever leave the foundation?

No, we're always on the foundation. We're always repenting and believing, but we build on them. We don't keep going over and starting over again and again.

[17 : 34] At some point we say, you know what? God has saved me. I am on the foundation. And so we build on them. We grow on them.

We use them. And so my point is, is some reason, one reason that Christians, some Christians are so slow to grow is, and they never end up putting a lot of effort into holiness, is because they're forever wondering about the foundation.

They're always uncertain about it. And so they're going back again and again. Am I saved? I don't know. Maybe I am. Maybe I'm not. I think I am. They're confident sometimes. And when they're confident, they make growth.

And they grow. And then the old doubts reassail them. And they go back to looking again at the foundation. And so they never make as much progress as they should or as they ought because they're starting over again all the time.

And if that's you, if you say, yes, I wrestle with that. Just a couple things. Just a couple things.

[18 : 40] One, know that you're not alone. and two, that we pray for you. I think one of the constant burdens of my heart is that if you're a Christian, that you would know with certainty what God has done for you and that God would give you that spirit of adoption and that you would feel it and experience it that wouldn't waver through doubt and fear.

That doesn't wonder, will Jesus hold me? Has he done enough? But God really does love me. And so maybe if that's you, dear Christian, where you wrestle with assurance, maybe the best thing that you could do for your growth and holiness is to make your calling and election sure and preach the gospel to yourself.

Pray for assurance. Get settled in your mind that you are a child of God, that Jesus Christ is enough, that he is your savior, that he is going to save you, that he has saved you, that he is saving you presently.

And so I want to direct your attention to the paper I gave you about assurance. And this is from our Confession of Faith. And just look at what it says there.

The infallible assurance of salvation is not an essential part of salvation. For a true believer may wait for a long time and struggle with many difficulties before he attains to it.

[20 : 17] It's not a matter of extraordinary revelation. For if he makes a right use of the means of grace and is enabled by the Spirit to know the things that believers receive freely from God, he may well attain to it.

It therefore becomes the duty of everyone to be as diligent as possible in making his calling and election sure. By doing this, he will experience greater peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, greater love and thankfulness to God, and increased strength and cheerfulness and dutiful obedience.

These things are the natural outcome of the assurance of salvation. And they constitute strong evidence that assurance does not lead men into loose living.

Now, I want you to notice here, where does assurance come from? What does the confession say? He says, or it says, not from extraordinary revelation.

And what he means there is, it doesn't, this sense of, I am saved. I know I am saved. That sense of assurance, of being confident, it doesn't come from extraordinary revelation.

[21:30] God does not come and speak into our minds. With a voice or something like that. But it says, the use of the means of grace.

So what are we talking about? We're talking about the word of God. We're talking about preaching. We're talking about the Lord's Supper. We're talking about prayer. We're talking about worship. We're talking about that sort of thing.

By the use of the means of grace and the enabling of the Spirit. It's not one without the other. It's not just read my Bible and pray.

And it's not just the Spirit. It's the Spirit using the means of grace to give me this assurance. And so it says, the Spirit uses these things to show us the things that God has freely given us.

What we have freely received from God. Assurance comes when you know that, you know what? God has really given me this. He's really forgiven me. I'm really His Son.

[22:32] I'm really justified. And so the Spirit takes the word of God and He applies the gospel promises and He makes them real and precious to us.

And that's where assurance comes from. But also, notice what assurance produces. What comes out of a life where I know I'm saved.

God loves me. God's made me a son. God's forgiven me. You see what it says. He will experience greater joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, greater love and thankfulness to God, and increased strength and cheerfulness and dutiful obedience.

That's holiness. Thankfulness. Strength to obey. You're obeying. You have love. You have peace. You have joy. That's the holy life that we are to pursue.

And when we have that assurance, this infallible assurance that the confession is talking about, it produces holiness in our lives.

[23:37] And so what do we need to do? It says, it therefore becomes the duty of everyone to be as diligent as possible in making his calling and election sure.

Now there's, I don't want to go into how you do that, just to say, that comes from praying. It comes from obeying.

It comes from reading God's word. It's through the use of these means of grace. And so we pray. Pray for eyes that will see what God has given us in Jesus Christ.

Pray for a greater faith. And so, I guess what I'm saying is, one reason that Christians don't grow like they ought is they're always going back to the foundation.

But once you have that foundation laid and it's solid and you're resting on it, then you can build on that. And so, for some of you, the best thing that you could do for your holiness and your sanctification is to make your calling and election sure.

[24:48] Reason number three, why am I not growing in holiness as I ought? I'm discouraged. I'm discouraged. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12.

Hebrews chapter 12. And this is where we started looking at the series. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14.

It says, Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. But, look at the context of this verse.

Look at verse 12. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees. Make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed. I think that there's no doubt that these Hebrews were discouraged.

They're discouraged. They have these feeble arms. They have weak knees. They're dragging themselves along. They're tired. And you can see why. Look at verse 4. What are they tired in?

[26:00] In your struggle against sin. They're tired. They're getting tired in this fight against sin. The sin from within. The sin from without.

They're tired of the conflict. They're tired of the discipline. Or tired in the discipline. And it was getting discouraging. And so maybe, maybe this is where you are.

You're discouraged with all of your sin. This can be so disheartening. One Dutch theologian, Wilhelms Brockel, he wrote this.

Many are too despondent to make progress. For they perceive so many vices in themselves. They are conscious of the many virtues they ought to have.

And this causes them to be at their wit's end. Furthermore, they deem all their efforts to have been fruitless until now and believe that all will be in vain in the future. Sin is too prevalent and the manifestations of virtues are too weak.

[27:03] They know not what to do and thus their hands become feeble. So, do you feel that way? Like, my sin is so great.

I need to be holy, but here I am. I'm not. There's so many areas in my life where I'm not what I ought to be. and it feels like my efforts have been in vain.

I make, my progress is so slow. And, as Brockle says, you get at your wit's end. You get discouraged and your hands become feeble.

Well, again, if this is how you feel, if this is something you wrestle with, you can take heart. Other Christians have felt that way before you. You aren't facing a temptation that is, that is not common to man.

And then, I would want to say, take heart. Do you feel that way? God is on your side. If he laid the foundation, he's going to put on the roof.

[28:08] What he began, he's going to complete. God is on your side. That your sin cannot separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God is for you.

And, I would just encourage you, read Romans 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Read it all the way through. And, it talks about what is now, what is now true of us because we have been justified.

God, God, nothing can separate us from the love of God. And so, take heart. If you've made, and here's another thing, if you've made any little progress, any true progress, even if it's little, the only explanation is that you do have a new heart.

If you've made any progress at all, no matter how small, that says God has done something. He's given you a new heart, a new disposition, and that means that growth is possible in every area, in every sin, in every virtue.

If the tree is good, if God has done a sovereign work of changing the tree, and you are starting to bear real fruit, but it's not like you want it to be, take heart.

[29:23] If the tree is good, in time, it will start to bear more and more fruit. So, don't be discouraged. Number four, why am I not progressing like I ought?

perhaps I'm still bound to this world. I'm bound to this world. I'm too worldly in my thinking. Well, what does it mean to be worldly in our thinking?

Look over at 1 John 2. It should be a few pages over. 1 John 2. This is a very familiar passage, but it really uncovers what is worldliness.

And the very fact that John is writing to Christians about this shows us that we as Christians can still, we do still wrestle against the world and its way of thinking.

Well, what does it mean to be worldly? Verse 15. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[30:30] For everything in the world the cravings of sinful man. That's the first thing. He's going to give us three or four things here. The first thing, what's in the world? The cravings of sinful man.

So what does it mean to be in the world, to be worldly? It means you want what sinful men want. You want what sinful men want. Now, what do sinful men want?

What do sinful men want? They want everything but God. sinful men want peace. They want prosperity.

They want happiness. They want things. Sometimes those are sinful things that they want.

Sometimes they're not. But whatever they want, they don't want God. There's no room for God in all of their thoughts.

So what does it mean to be worldly? It just means you want what everyone else wants. There's no meaningful difference between your goals and their goals. They want a nice yard, a picket fence, and children that behave.

[31:32] They want peace and prosperity. They want everyone to get along. But they don't want God. So they don't hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What else marks the world? He goes on. The cravings of sinful men, the lust of his eyes. What does it mean to be worldly? It's to want the things that you can see.

To want things you can see. Heaven doesn't matter. God doesn't matter. You can't see them.

Spiritual realities are not realities to the worldly person.

The worldly person. The big things in your life are the things that you can see. What else marks the world? What they're proud of. What they boast in. Look at what it says.

And the boasting of what he has and does. What does it mean to be worldly? It's to boast in yourself. It's to be proud of what you have and what you have done.

[32 : 34] Now, this broadens our view of what it means to be worldly. Being worldly isn't certain music. It's not certain movies.

Certain genres of things. It's far bigger than that. It's a mindset that takes pride in, that finds joy and fulfillment and a sense of satisfaction in what I have and what I've done.

So, I haven't watched bad movies. I don't listen to rock music. Our church plays hymns. We don't go for those conversational preachers where it's just full of chit-chat stories.

We only go for the real deal. We only go for solid preaching. We're different than they are. We don't bow to public opinion. We aren't seeker-sensitive. We don't sing the 7-Eleven songs. Look at what we have here.

Look at what we've done. worldliness can take all kinds of forms. When it's just about I'm boasting in what I have and what I do.

[33 : 41] I take pride in those things. But worldliness and holiness never go together. Worldliness never produces love and gratefulness.

It never produces a heart that loves God's law and longs to obey it. So what is worldliness?

It's wanting what sinful men want. It's the things that I can see are the important things in my life and it's boasting about what I have and what I do. Now you have to ask yourself to what degree am I still worldly?

No doubt it's something that we all struggle with. Is that a predominant part of your life Christian? Are you halting between two opinions? Between yourself and Christ between the world and God are you fastened to this world? A bird fastened to the earth will want to fly but every time he takes off he'll get yanked right down.

[34 : 48] And if we want to fly heavenward in holiness we have to cut ourselves off from this earth. We have to cut off cut ourselves free from this world and its way of thinking.

Reason number five and here's where we're going to end. Why am I not growing in holiness like I ought? I'm lazy. I'm lazy. And let me just give you some quotes and some Bible verses here.

Three quotes to begin with. First, Martin Lloyd-Jones. The New Testament calls upon us to take action. It does not tell us that the work of sanctification is going to be done for us.

We are in the good fight of faith and we have to do the fighting. But thank God we are enabled to do it for the moment we believe and are justified by faith and are born again of the spirit of God.

We have the ability. So the New Testament method of sanctification is to remind us of that. To remind us of what we have. We're justified. We have the spirit of God. We're born again. And having reminded us of it, it says, now then go and do it.

[36 : 03] That's Martin Lloyd-Jones. So, you can be holy because of who you are in Christ, because of what you have in him. And so the word of the New Testament is, now go and do it.

Work it out. Jerry Bridges. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life. But just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part.

God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness, but he has given us the responsibility of doing the walking. J.C. Ryle. A Christian has two great marks about him.

He is known for his inner warfare and his inner peace. So Christians rest in the gospel. They rest in who Jesus Christ is and they fight against sin.

It's not one without the other. The gospel never gives us a reason to rest in our sin. The gospel never gives us a reason to rest in our sin, to have compassion on our sin, to relax.

[37 : 16] Now some verses. Romans 8, 13. If by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. What are we to do?

By the spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body. Fighting for holiness is fighting for your life. That first part of that verse says if you live according to the flesh you will die.

Colossians 3, 5. Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. Put it to death. Don't wait for it to be put to death.

Put it to death. Luke 13, 24. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door because many I tell you will try to enter and will not be able to.

1 Timothy 6, 12. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. Paul is not saying cruise on into heaven.

[38 : 17] Cruise on into eternal life. He's saying take a hold of it. Fight the good fight of faith.

Philippians 3, 12-14. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to take a 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.

Paul wasn't cruising in. Paul wasn't taking it easy. He was pressing to win a prize. So fighting, pressing, straining, putting to death, making every effort.

That's the opposite of laziness. And one reason Christians don't grow as they ought is simply they don't try.

they need to know the Spirit's power. They need to be assured in the gospel. They need to believe in the promises of God. And they need to fight, strive, and make every effort.

Paul said, I work harder than any of them, though not I, but the grace of God that is within me. Paul trusted in the grace of God, but Paul also tried.

[39 : 38] So that would be my encouragement. Trust and obey. Well, we are dismissed. Thank you.