



TEXT MESSAGE

WestHills Church / January 8, 2012

This Week's How To: Grow

(Each week we highlight a specific biblical thought that helps us accomplish our God-given mission and vision--we call them "How Tos".)

Identity in Christ – I grow as I understand my identity in Christ, embracing my significance as a child of God. (John 1:12)

Let's begin by stating the central truth of Henry Scougal's book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Sprinkle Publications, 1986, originally, 1677). The central truth of the book in his words is that true religion is essentially an inward, free, self-moving principle of divine life, not merely a system of thought or behavior constrained by external considerations. It is the life of God within the human soul enlivening and motivating; it is not "driven merely by threatenings, nor bribed by promises, nor constrained by laws" (p. 36). How would you put that in more contemporary language? I would say: Becoming a Christian is more like a larva becoming a butterfly than like **a republican becoming a democrat** (or if you prefer: a democrat becoming a republican).

There is something wonderful and true about this comparison and there is something terrible and misleading about it. The wonderful and true thing is that being a Christian does indeed compare to being a non-Christian like flying in a garden compares to lying in a cocoon. When the divine command comes to a butterfly, "Fly!" it feels no burden, no fear, no guilt. It just does what it has been made to do: it flies—and sings to the grace of God with every flap of the wing. It has the new nature of a flier that it didn't have when it was a larva in the cocoon. That is what Scougal means by the "vital principle" of true religion in the soul.

But when the divine command comes to the larva in the cocoon, "Fly!" it does not fly. Instead it has three options for how it can respond. 1) It can sink in despair and say, "I can't fly! There is no hope for me!" Or 2) it can soar in self-deceit and say, "I am flying! See, there is the ground way down there." Or 3) it can do what St. Augustine did and cry out, "Command what you will, and grant what you command—Make me a butterfly, O my God!"

The true and wonderful thing about the comparison is that it points to the necessity and the miracle of the new birth. To be a Christian is to have a new vital principle of life in the soul so that the commands of God are not oppressive, but are the beckoning of a beautiful spring day and the aroma of a flower-filled garden. By the grace of God we have been transformed into butterflies. The life of God has come to dwell in our soul and it is now our nature to be up and flying for the Savior.

But, on the other hand, if you press the comparison too far, it is terrible and misleading because in fact Christian conversion is more like changing political parties than becoming a butterfly, because it always involves the presentation of truth to the mind and a reasonable appeal to the will of the unbeliever. The miracle of spiritual metamorphosis from a non-Christian larva to a Christian butterfly does not happen through the unconscious chemical processes inside a cocoon, but through the conscious consideration of truth.

John Piper, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*

A Situation for Discussion: You're at the end of your rope. You and your husband have been drifting apart for years. As far as you're concerned, you've done everything you could to preserve your marriage but to no avail. You tried harder to be a better wife, you went for counseling; you prayed. But nothing worked. He just moved out. All he said on his way out the door was he didn't love you anymore and wanted a divorce. You're depressed, can't sleep, and don't feel like eating. Life is hard. If you are significant as a child of God, why does God allow this to happen?



Day 1: ENCOUNTER God's word to put yourself in touch with Him.

⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Day 2: EXPLORE the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

1. Who is Paul writing this letter to and why?
2. Define "grace" in your own words.
3. Define "saved" in your own words.
4. Define "faith" in your own words.
5. Define "works" in your own words.
6. If someone thought they could be saved by themselves as this implies, how might they argue their belief?
7. What does this passage say about our purpose?
8. How is Paul trying to encourage the believers?
9. Do a little theology. What does this verse say about God?
10. What does this passage say about our relationship to God?
11. Discussion: How could this passage impact how we live our lives?

Day 3: EXAMINE an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Main Idea of the Passage: Our change is God's handiwork.

It is most unfortunate that in most of our minds the thought unit is not Ephesians 2:7-10, but rather 2:8-10. Verses 8-10 are two statements, introduced by the word "for," in support of Paul's main statement in verse 7. The primary purpose of God for sending His Son to die in the sinner's place, was not to produce the happiness of the sinner, saved by grace, but rather the demonstration of the grace of God for all eternity.

God's purposes are not merely temporal, they are eternal. God's purpose in saving sinners is not just to make men happy, to provide blessings, or to enable men to escape the torments of hell. The fact is that God is just as glorified by the punishment of the wicked as He is the salvation of those whom He makes righteous (see Romans 9:14-23; 1 Peter 2:12; Revelation 16:4-7). Whether it be in the punishment of the wicked or in the salvation of sinners by grace, God is working out all things to His own glory. The salvation of sinners is thus subordinate to God's ultimate purpose of bringing glory to Himself. In the case of the salvation of sinners, it is the grace of God which is on display. In the case of the judgment of the wicked, it is the holiness and justice of God which is demonstrated.

It should be pointed out that if, as Paul writes, it is the riches of the grace of God which is to be displayed for all eternity, then salvation must be all of God's doing, and not of our own. Grace is divine favor which is undeserved. God will not share His glory with any other being, and thus the work of salvation is entirely His work. Paul gives two lines of supporting evidence for his statement that God has saved us for the demonstration of the riches of His grace. Each of these begin with the word "for." The first is found in verses 8 and 9, the second in verse 10. The first concentrates on the cause of our salvation; the second on its effects. Whether in its cause or in its effects, salvation is all of God, and all of grace.

In Ephesians 2:8 and 9 Paul contends that salvation is not of man's doing, but of God's. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." Men are saved by grace, not by works. This would come as more of a revelation to the self-righteous Jews than to the Gentiles. Men do not enter into eternal life because of their good deeds, but because of God's goodness, in Christ. We have been saved by grace, through faith. This salvation is God's gift, and not compensation for our efforts. And this is so that we will not boast, but will rather give glory to God. One cannot boast because of what we have done, but only in what He has done. Bob Deffinbaugh, bible.org

Day Four: EMBRACE how God spoke to you through His word.

Our desire is to not to be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week:

Journal your thoughts on the passage:

- Write about what God wants you to know...
- Write about how God wants you to feel...
- Write about what God wants you to do...

"The Art" (use the provided space for sermon notes on Saturday's message)

Home Group Discussion (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group):

Perfection. What does it mean that God is perfect? Is perfection what we should aim for as Christians? Is it attainable?