

Theme: Christian moral formation is the lifelong process of putting off sins, putting on Christlike virtues and being renewed so our thoughts and desires are like Christ.

I. Intro - How Do We Grow In Character?

- A. Sola series - very doctrinal foundation; Gospel
- B. Justified by faith - but how do we grow in works?
- C. How do we grow in Christlike character?

II. The Foundation: The Gospel

- A. The foundation of this process is the Gospel
You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.
²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. Eph 4:20–21
 - 1. Looking back to their conversion - come to know; past
 - 2. This was focus of first 3 chapters of Ephesians
 - 3. The key verbs - those in Christ must walk in Him
 - a. Ephesians 1-3 - sit - our place in Christ by Gospel
 - b. Ephesians 4-5 - walk - walking out our salvation
 - c. Ephesians 6 - stand - our posture against Satan
- B. Why the Gospel must be the foundation
 - 1. We are justified by faith alone - and raised to life
 - 2. We can not be formed into Christ's image until we are in Christ - justification precedes sanctification
 - 3. The Gospel is not only how we are justified; it also is what fuels our moral formation

III. The Process of Christian Moral Formation

- A. Moral formation is a lifelong process
You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22–24
 - 1. There is a process - put off; renew mind; put on
 - 2. Christian moral formation is the lifelong process of putting off sins, putting on Christlike virtues & being renewed so our thoughts and desires are like Christ.
 - 3. Because this is a process, it is not instantaneous
 - 4. Because this is a struggle against sin, we do not make easy linear progress, but rather experience periods of growth followed by intense struggle and failure
 - 5. The end goal of Christian moral formation is to have the character of Christ formed in us, thus fulfilling the image of God we were made to be originally
 - 6. This process will not be completed until the final day when we have seen Christ and been fully glorified
- B. Understanding the process of Christian moral formation
You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22–24
 - 1. Step 1 - put off old self, its desires & practices (v22)

- a. When we come to Christ, our sin nature still longs to rule us
 - b. Just because we are Christians does not mean our desires are righteous - many of them are foolish, sinful and destructive
 - c. To grow in character requires the hard work of putting off our old self by rejecting its desires and refusing to continue in its practices
2. Step 2 - putting on new self with his practices (v24)
- a. It is not enough to put off sin; we must replace it with positive virtue and righteous actions
 - b. It is not enough to stop old sinful habits; we must replace them with Christlike habits
 - c. To put on the new self means to begin to act in a Christlike manner - even if we still desire to act otherwise
 - d. When we first put on the new self and begin to practice righteousness and holiness it will feel foreign, for our old sinful habits are familiar while the new virtues are unfamiliar
 - e. However, over time the new habits of virtue begin to become second nature, while our old sinful habits begin to lose their appeal and feel foreign
3. Step 3 - renewing the mind (v23)
- a. To be renewed in mind means to begin to have our thoughts and attitudes line up with God and His truth
 - b. This is the stage in the process where we actually begin to desire the things God desires, and when virtue is more appealing than vice
 - c. We can only reach this stage by the consistent practice of putting off old self and its desires and habits and putting on the new self with its desires and habits

IV. Two Key Questions About Christian Moral Formation

- A. What is the correct order for the process?
- You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22–24
1. Renewing the mind was last; but it is middle here
 2. It is actually the last everywhere else

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:9–10

 - a. Note order here: put off, put on, renewed
 - b. This is order in actual examples in Ephesians 4

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:28

 1. Step 1 - stop stealing (put off vice)
 2. Step 2 - start working (put on virtue)
 3. Step 3 - share with others (new desire to share)
 3. This is the actual order in practice - if we wait for our desires to be correct we will never grown in our moral formation.
 4. This means that we must start doing the proper actions even before we desire to do them, knowing that they are right - and the desires will follow later

5. This is also true because it is practices that help shape our desires and character. If we continue to do the right thing, even if we do not yet have the desire, it eventually shapes who we are at the deepest level.
6. Individual acts lead to habits; habits lead to character; the fruit of character is godly desires

B. Isn't this inauthentic, "fake it till you make it"?

1. Many today decry such an idea as inauthentic, "fake it till you make it"
2. Such people state that to be authentic we must express who we are in our actions; all else is repression
3. This idea is the death of any chance for moral formation, for such formation of necessity requires changing who we are and what we desire

Quotes on moral formation from Rebecca DeYoung, *Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice*, 67

"Acting as if" cannot simply be conflated with hypocrisy; rather, like our reluctant pianist's training, it is a process of moral formation in which we deliberately practice actions that we endorse, hoping that they will eventually feel natural and gradually become part of our character... The end of the process is a moral character that feels like "second nature..."

This isn't hypocrisy; we don't act contrary to our impulses in an attempt to fake anyone out. We act contrary to our impulses because we wish to be retrained. We wish to be something other than what we are today... This form of training — "transformation through imitation" — is "unavailable to the hyper-authentic," for if you can never act out of step with your current feelings, you will never be able to discipline the immature desires that are now part of your character. Complete consistency of character, which allows only actions perfectly in step with one's current dispositions and feelings, thoughts and imagination, leaves no room for development and growth.

4. If we think through this, it is how we create habits and character in every area of life
 - a. Get in shape/improve health
 - b. Learning a new skill like playing an instrument
 - c. Forming the character of our children
 - d. How we treat our spouse
5. To say we won't change our behavior until our desires are changed is to decide to never make real progress in moral formation

V. Applying the Word

- A. Where do I need to be morally formed by the Spirit?
 1. What is one sin I need to "put off"?
 2. What is the opposing virtue I need to "put on"?
 3. What practice will put off the vice & put on the virtue?

4. Examples

- a. Unforgiveness is opposed by forgiveness; best practices are praying for the person, communicate forgiveness and affection to them
- b. Greed is opposed by contentment; the best practice is giving
- c. Eating out of control is opposed by self-control/temperance; best practice is fasting

- 5. Take time to meditate on an area to practice moral formation

B. The Table of Grace

- 1. Christian moral formation is rooted in the Gospel
- 2. We are not on a self-help project!
- 3. This Table of Grace roots our formation in the Gospel
 - a. Christ has paid for all of our vices and lack of virtues
 - b. At this Table we feed upon Christ to be strengthened
 - c. The Spirit will empower us to put off and put on, renewing us to the image of Christ

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thess 5:23–24

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:20–24

Christian Moral Formation

Ephesians 4:20-24
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1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

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