

# Positives in the Christian Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Spiritual growth is a low priority. A recent Barna survey explored seven dimensions of spiritual development asking respondents to rate themselves in each area of a five-point scale. Researcher George Barna noted most people do not feel as if they are learning enough about God, the Christian life, or their role in the world. And most of them don't care. That's what they found out.

Well, but I know you do. I know you care about your spiritual growth, and that's why we're here together today, this morning. We are continuing in our series on spiritual growth. We are again in the book of Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17 and following. Last week we dealt with the negatives in the Christian life, the things that we are to get rid of, the things that we are to put off, behaviors that we are not to be engaged in, behaviors that don't belong in a mature Christian's life. Things like don't go to bed mad, don't take what's not yours, don't engage in worthless or corrupt communication. So today, let's glean what we can from these same verses we went over last week, but look at the positives in the Christian life. Look at what our growing life in Christ should look like. So let's take a look in the book of Ephesians this morning at chapter number 4, beginning with verse number 17, where the Bible says, this I say, therefore, Paul is saying, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk. Here is where we began to see the things that do not belong in our life.

He says, first of all, in the futility of their mind, not knowing what to think, not knowing what to believe, because having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them. They just don't know the things of God because of the blindness of their heart, who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. He says, he goes on to say in verse number 20, but you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, that you put off concerning your former conduct or your former lifestyle, the habits and the behaviors, the old man, our old nature, which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lust, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor. Why? For we are members of one another.

Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands that which is good, that he may have something to give to someone or to one who him or him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Verse 31, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor, evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice or evil intent, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Let's pray this morning. Lord, teach us today. Help us to learn.

Help us to be able to be putting on the lifestyle and the behaviors that you want us to be engaged in that are worthy of you, because the Holy Spirit lives within us. We thank you. We pray in Jesus' name.

[ 4 : 39 ] So what is the first thing we see in these verses? The first positive thing, he says, for those of you taking notes this morning, let the Holy Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.

The first thing that Paul says is when we are putting off these former behaviors, when we are choosing not to live as the Gentiles live, that we don't live according to our former life, let the Holy Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Notice he doesn't begin with find a plan and set a goal and work hard and try really hard to change and turn over a new leaf. He doesn't say that.

He says, let the Holy Spirit renew your thoughts and your attitudes. Look at verse 23. He says, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, because thinking precedes action. As we think in our mind, as we think in our heart, so are we. So he says, let the Holy Spirit be in the process of renewing your mind.

Because when we trust Christ, we're made new in the attitude of our minds. According to verses 18 and 19, we're no longer futile in our thinking or darkened in our understanding or ignorant.

We learn the truth of God as we read God's word, as he's given it to us. So we become renewed in our minds. Now, these are not commands because the construction here in the Greek and the parallel text in Colossians chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, it's not in the imperative mood, but they are facts that followers of Jesus Christ have learned. And that's what Paul is saying. He says, you've not so learned Christ. He says, and you'll be followers and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Allow the Holy Spirit to be renewing your mind. Notice it's not something that we we do. It's something we allow the spirit to do in us.

[ 6 : 53 ] That's the active part, submitting to the spirit and letting the Holy Spirit in your mind through the truth or by way of the truth of the word of God. There are facts that followers of Jesus Christ have learned. We're new people that we're new people in Christ and we can no longer live as we used to live. It's simply expected of us. If you're a follower of Christ, we're expected to live differently.

Salvation is a crisis that leads to a process. Let me say that again. Salvation is a crisis that leads to a process. And all a crisis is, is a crossroads. We come to a point where we have to make a decision. We come to a point where we understand and realize that we're lost apart from Christ. That's a crisis. So what is our decision? Our decision is either to continue on in our lost condition or to trust Christ as our Savior, submit to Him. And it's that crisis point that begins the process. We're saved when we trust Christ as our Savior at a point in time. And that begins a process throughout the rest of our life here on earth as we grow spiritually, as we begin to learn more and more about Him, and as He teaches us through His Word, and as the Holy Spirit renews our thoughts and renews our attitude. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. God renews our mind as we surrender our all to Him. Through Christ, once and for all, we've been given a new position as His new creation.

And day by day, we must appropriate what He's given us. Let's look at Romans chapter 12, verse 1. Paul again says, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And then we get to verse number 2.

And do not be conformed. Do not allow the world to conform us to its image. But he says, rather, be transformed. And we see this idea again. Be transformed by what? The renewing of our mind, allowing the Holy Spirit to make us new, to give us a new way of thinking. Because every one of us looks at the world through a particular filter. Every one of us looks at the world through a grid. And so when we see something, what we do is we interpret it based upon our preconceived ideas, our attitudes, and our beliefs. And when Christ comes, when the Holy Spirit comes into our life, what He does is, I went to the eye doctor this week. My vision did change, but he said, not enough where I need new glasses. But do any of you remember when you first needed glasses, and you just didn't realize because gradually your eyesight began to change, and you thought fuzzy was the way things were? And you got a brand new pair of glasses. I remember it like it was yesterday. The first day that I got glasses, when I walked out of the eye doctor's office, it was like a night and day difference. Everything was just so clear. It felt like the ground had come up to meet me and my chin. [ 10 : 38 ] It was like, whoa, I can see the ground now. And it was a new way of seeing. That's what the Holy Spirit does in our life. When He comes into our life, He gives us a brand new way of seeing things.

And that's what He says, to be renewed in our minds, that you may prove what is that good, verse 2 goes on to say, an acceptable and perfect will of God. In John 17, verse 17, we're told, Jesus says, sanctify them through your truth. Remember in Jesus' high priestly prayer, He's praying to the Father, sanctify them, set them apart through your truth. It's the truth of God's Word that sets us free because He says, Father, your Word is truth. It doesn't contain truth. It is truth. There's a difference. There are a lot of books on the shelves that contain truth. But not every Word in that book may be true. That is not so with the Bible. All of God's Word is truth. Now, the Bible records lies. You say, well, the Bible contains lies. Well, when a person lied and the

Bible records it, the Bible simply recorded what a person said and a person did. But when it comes from God and when it comes from a prophet of God and when it comes from the writers that God chose to write His Word, they were led and they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write down God's truth as He gave it to them. And so Jesus said, your Word is truth. So as the mind understands the truth of God, it is gradually transformed by the Holy Spirit. And then what this renewed mind and this change of attitude does is it leads to a changed life. Our thoughts precede our actions. When we begin to think differently, we will then begin to act differently because we act based upon what we believe. We act based upon what we think. You ever heard the saying, you are what you eat? Well, that's true physically because if we eat junk food and if we eat all kinds of foods we shouldn't eat, which is what I've been doing lately. The pants are getting a little bit tighter and I've got to move the belt loop up a little bit and so made the decision this morning. I've got to go back to eating good food, eating things that are good and not all the junk food, not all the processed sugar.

So we are what we eat because if we eat junk long enough, it's going to show in our life. And the same thing is true with the what we believe. Proverbs 23, 7, as a man thinks in his heart, what is the rest?

So is he. As we think in our heart, in our mind, down deep inside, that's who we are really. You know, someone might say they love you or someone might say they care about you, but then it goes, they're proven by their actions and what goes on from there. So what we think in our mind, that is how we're going to act. So this is why it's important for us as followers of Jesus to spend quality time in God's Word every day. Whether you go through and read God's Word through in a year or whether you read one chapter in a year, the point is how much of it are you taking in?

[14:17] How much of it are you absorbing? How much of it are you utilizing and allowing it to change our mind, change our way of thinking, and in turn change what we do and change how we act? And so God's Word is true and it'll change our life. It will change our behaviors. So let the Holy Spirit change our thoughts and our attitudes. That's the first step that we see. The second thing that we see is we are to put on our new nature. Remember he said that we are to take off, put off the old man, put off, throw off, just like you take a jacket or just like if you've been out in the yard before and you stepped in an ant pile unknowingly and they're crawling up your pants and socks and whatever, what do you begin to do? You begin to strip. You don't care who's watching, right? Because you want to stop those things from biting you and so you take it off or you have old dirty smelly clothes, you've been working out the yard all day and what you want to do is you want to take those off and often you want to take them off before you get into the house or get hopefully some of you, those of you who have a mudroom, that's awesome because you can leave the stuff there and then walk into your clean home. The Holy Spirit does that into our lives, in our lives. So we put off our former lifestyle, we put off our old nature and then he says it's not enough to disrobe, we've got to put something else on in its place. So he says put on the new nature, verse 24, and that you put on the new man, the new person that we become. When we trust Christ as our Savior, all things are what? Passed away. Behold, all things, and the tense of the verb changes, all things are becoming new. It's a process, remember? Salvation began with a crisis. We had a choice to make. We make the right choice, we trust Christ, and that begins the process of growing in Christ. And we trust that's what we begin to do is grow. Do you realize that a follower of Jesus is a paradox? Yes, we are a paradox. And what I mean by that is we all have a fallen nature. We all have a potential for failure.

And we have an old nature that never leaves us as long as we live here on planet earth. So the paradox is we have this old nature that is within us and is fighting for control. That's what Paul, the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans chapter 7. That's what Paul was talking about in his letter to the Romans where he said, I know what's right. And he says, I really try to do what's right. But before I know it, I go and say something really, really awful. Or I hurt someone. Or I do something that is not right. And I engage in some form of behavior. That's the paradox. We have that ability to fail. We have that propensity to sin.

We have that bent towards sin. But we also have the Holy Spirit residing in us. And the Holy Spirit is what counteracts that force of our sinful nature.

But what this does, having the Holy Spirit within us, what it does is it places unlimited power at our disposal. Do you realize that? Although you should have been a little more excited about that. We have, although we have the propensity, although we have that bent towards sin, we have a Holy Spirit within us that gives us unlimited potential for power and for saying no to temptation.

Do you have trouble saying no to temptation? Praying for victory in some area of your life? Well, understand this. As a follower of Christ, and you may want to take this note down.

[ 18 : 38 ] As a follower of Christ, you are not fighting for victory. You are fighting from victory. You are fighting in victory. See, there's a difference. We're not fighting for victory.

Because Jesus already defeated the devil at the cross of Calvary. And the Holy Spirit is already in us. And we already have the power. The Bible says we already have the victory.

We just have to accept it and appropriate it and live accordingly. And so when we're saying, oh, you know, I'm so, I've got all these temptations and I'm fighting for victory. I'm praying for victory.

Well, the reality is we ought to just stop and say, thank you, God, for the victory. And I trust you for the power to live in victory. Does that make sense?

So it's not something we have to reach out for and grab on to that's elusive. It's something we already have because the Holy Spirit has already given us the victory. And that's why the Bible says we are more than conquerors.

[ 19 : 43 ] Through Christ who gave himself for us. And so we are victorious. We have a victor living within us and we just need to allow him to take the reins and control.

And so that is the difference. That's the paradox. We have a bent towards sin, but we have the Holy Spirit living within us to say or to give us the power not to sin.

See, we've actually become a participator in the divine nature. And as such, Jesus is able to live through us. And one of my favorite verses is Galatians chapter 2, verse 20.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me in the life which I now live in the flesh. I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

What does Galatians chapter 2, verse 20 tell us? It's not we who live. It's Christ living his life through us. And so, therefore, we already have the victory.

[ 20 : 53 ] We just let Christ live life through us. We surrender to him and allow him to give him the reins of our life. And we let him control.

So, Paul says, it's not I who's trying to work up these good works. He said, I just let Christ live through me.

So, think about this. We have the power that raised Jesus from the dead coursing through us. We have that very same power that raised Christ from the dead providing victory in our lives.

So, we already have all we need for a victorious life. Next, what we see in these verses is, I'm sorry about the slide. It's so small, it's hard to read.

But what we see next here in these verses, the new behavior that we are to put on, he says, we are to work hard. We are to be hard workers. We are to be laborers.

[ 21 : 52 ] So, don't take what's not yours. Stop stealing. Instead, he says, labor. Work hard. Work for a living.

But he gives us a good reason for it. He says, so you can give to those who have need. So, you can give to others in need. Let's look at verse 28 together. Where Paul says, let him who stole steal no longer.

Now, it's kind of an odd thing to put here. Maybe. I'm sure it was an issue that was true in their society at the time. So, he says, let him who stole.

Stop stealing. Don't steal any longer. But rather, let him labor. Let him work. Working with his hands. What is good? That he may have something to give him who has need.

Now, here is a unique purpose for working. As we see in this verse, a Christian shouldn't steal. We say, well, that's obvious. But we don't always understand the truth.

[ 22 : 56 ] The truth is, work hard for a living or work for a living so that you'll have enough to give to somebody else who has a need. Not just to fill our coffers.

Not just so we have more. That's not the reason for working, the Bible says. The Bible says, work so you have enough to give to others. Instead, work in order to give to the needy.

Think about this. A thief takes from others for his own benefit. A thief takes things because he wants them.

He wants to enjoy their use. A thief takes so he can enjoy it for his own benefit. Whereas a follower of Christ is to work doing something useful with his own hands for the purpose of sharing with those in need.

That's a major, major difference. And it's a major difference in attitude toward work. You see, work has a number of benefits.

[ 23 : 59 ] Number one, it provides for our material needs. It keeps the creditors at bay. It keeps insurance.

It keeps the gas. It keeps the electricity on. It puts gasoline in your automobiles.

It provides food on your table. So work provides for our material needs. But that's only one thing that work does. Secondly, it gives us something useful to do.

Think about those who retire and ride their recliner. Before you know it, they get bored. They get lazy. They become depressed.

And have no purpose for existence. And work not only provides for our material needs, but work gives us something useful to do.

[ 25 : 01 ] Something that's beneficial for us. And something that is beneficial for others. Because when we do nothing, many times we see people's health begin to fail when they do nothing after they retire.

Or if they choose to do nothing. And so we understand that it gives us something useful to do. But also, number three, it enables us to give to others who have need.

That's the reason Paul said. He says, and if you read through the book of Proverbs, if you read through Psalms, and a number of places I've been reading through, through the Bible, and was in the Ecclesiastes, and one of the things that Solomon said was, he said he saw it all a futility for a person who works hard only for his own needs.

He said we're to give. We're to help others. We're to have enough to where we can help others who have a need. A lazy Christian robs not only himself, but robs God.

Understand this. God saved us to work. And not just work a job. But he gave us a job to do, to share the gospel, to meet one another's needs, to encourage one another, to build up the body of Christ through the use of our spiritual gifts.

[ 26 : 24 ] And so we are to be engaged in activity that serves others. And so we are to be useful in what we do. Now, of course, Paul is not writing to those who could not work because of handicap.

The Bible is very clear that we are to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. But he was writing to those who are physically capable, mentally able to work, and should be working. What does the Bible say about those who would not work? Don't let them eat. Well, that sounds hard. Well, if they're able-bodied and if they are able to work, he says, don't give them a handout. Basically, let them work to get something. Now, if somebody loses a job or somebody is not able to because of the job that they have to fully take care of themselves, then he says, that person is working and they're working hard.

Some people work two jobs and still can't make ends meet. We have to give kudos to somebody like that. You know, not everyone has the ability to have a job that pays an exorbitant salary because we have a significant number of people around us and even in our midst who work hard, who work more than one job and who take little odd jobs and still have difficulty finding a way to make ends meet.

[ 27 : 56 ] Those are the ones that God says, let's help. Because if you have extra and somebody has a need, that's why we work, so we can help others. And then lastly, now you say, well, this is kind of obvious.

Be kind one to another. Now, why would Paul have to say that? Because we're not always kind to one another, right?

Sometimes we might be a little off-putting. Sometimes we might be a little bit quick. Sometimes we just might be unfeeling. So he says, be kind to one another.

Let's take a look at verse 32. And be kind. How many ways can we say that? Not many. He just says, and be kind to one another. In the Greek, it means be kind to one another.

I mean, really, literally, that's what it means. He says, kind of be gentle with one another. Have a gentle spirit toward one another. Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

[ 29 : 02 ] Why? And here's another, Paul liked to give motives. Paul liked to give reasons. You know, we all, little ones, kids, toddlers are like this.

Well, I need you to do this. And what do they say? Why? You know, and sometimes it's irritating to us, but it shows that they're inquisitive. It shows that they want to understand the motivation.

Now, sometimes your answer just has to be because mommy said so, because daddy said so. And then maybe we can explain the whys behind it.

But Paul loved to give motivations. Why? Because, again, when we have the proper motive, see, we will never fully be able to accomplish the what until we have the why, until we truly understand the why.

You say, well, why should I be kind? Why should I? Well, why should I serve the body of Christ? Why should I give to those who have need? Well, Paul gives the reason.

[ 30 : 10 ] Because we're a body. Because we are a family. Be kind to one another. Forgive one another. Why? Because Christ forgave you. Because even though we didn't deserve forgiveness, God forgave us.

So, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you. If we are not very kind, we are not very spiritual. Now, you can post that on Facebook.

If we are not very kind, we are not very spiritual. And I bet you'd get a bunch of likes for that. If you are not very kind, you are not very spiritual. Now, sometimes, we're not very spiritual because we're just not that kind.

And so, that's what Paul says. He said, and be kind to one another. And this is kindness that results in being tender to the needs of those around us.

Being cognizant, being aware of others around us and the needs of others. We talked about that during Sunday school this morning. Or in Sunday school this morning. About what are some concrete ways we can serve or meet others' needs around us.

[ 31 : 27 ] Well, be aware of them. Be aware of their needs. And then, do something physically to take care of that need. It's one thing to pray for someone, but it's another thing to ask, what can I do for you right now?

And take care of that need physically. This is a kindness that makes it easy for us to forgive. This is kindness that demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ to others.

So he says, put off the old nature. Allow the Holy Spirit to change. Allow the Holy Spirit to renew your thoughts and your attitudes. because we know that our thinking forms our behavior.

The way that we think, thoughts become our actions. So allow the Holy Spirit to renew our thoughts and our minds. He says we are to work hard so that we are able to give to others.

He says we are to be kind to one another as well. So as we conclude, as we wrap this up, we are to be different.

[ 32 : 34 ] As followers of Christ, we are to be different from those who do not follow Christ. It should come as a no-brainer, as an obvious, but all too often we do not stop and think, why am I to be different?

How am I to be different? By allowing the Holy Spirit to change our thinking, to change our attitude, to change the way we view the world. We are to be different. We are to be maturing and we are to be ready for the responsibility that Christ gave us in the body of Christ.

And then secondly, we are to be effective in serving others as Jesus lives through us. Because remember, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are not waiting for victory.

We are living in victory. and we just need to appropriate it by submitting and surrendering to God's Holy Spirit and allow the power of God to flow through us.

You say, well, that's not easy. You're right, it's not. Because our human nature rears its ugly head all too often and says, well, you've got to do something. You've got to try. You've got to work harder.

[ 33 : 46 ] You've got to find a way out where God is telling us, no, just surrender and let me do it. Let me take care of it. You don't need to do this. Just trust me and I will take care of the rest.

I'll provide what you're lacking and I will give you whatever it is that you need. I will give you the fulfillment. Fulfillment that lasts.

Not the momentary fulfillment or pleasure that comes from momentary sin or from sin. But pleasure that lasts, fulfillment that lasts by doing things God's way.

Let's pray. Lord, this morning, as you've shown us through your word the things that we should be putting on, the behaviors, the thoughts, the attitudes that we should be allowing your Holy Spirit to produce in us and through us.

Father, we continue to pray that you would give us, continue to provide victory in our lives as your Holy Spirit is living in us and through us.

[ 34 : 47 ] Father, we thank you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.