



Growing in Christ: The “Love Is” Challenge

I became a believer in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior in the spring of 1989. I didn’t talk about it to anyone. It was a very beautiful but very private moment in my life.

Years later my best friend had a spiritual crisis in her life (was ready to become a believer) and asked me to come talk with her about Jesus. She made a statement that has always “stuck” with me. She said, “I know when you became a Christian. I remember it.” She went on to say, “You were always a sweet, nice, kind, generous person. But I knew something was different about you. I just knew it.”

Our salvation should change us in ways that are both invisible and visible. We are told in Ephesians 5 to be *“imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love...”*

If you have read the BoBs [Working Out Our Salvation with Fear and Trembling](#) and *Christians Are a Bunch of Hypocrites! – coming soon--* you have probably noticed a recurring theme: **many Christians accept Jesus’ gracious gift of salvation then “sit down”** – meaning they make no effort to grow in their faith and likeness to Him. At the very least this is sad, perhaps tragic. (The tragedy is both for them and for the unsaved world – more on this in later blogs.)

The New Testament is full of warnings and admonitions about the expected behavior of the Believer.

Romans 12:2 tells us: *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,”* which effectively means, “stop being like you were before you were saved!” Before we are saved, we are “of this world” and are “conformed” to it. That is supposed to stop – it happens **progressively and intentionally**. If it happened automatically there would be no need to talk about it in the NT.

If we took the time to go through the entire New Testament to list every “example” of how a Believer should be different from a non-believer it would take pages (at least I assume so, I’ve never done it.) It could all be wrapped up in this one: ***“Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** *Matthew 5:48* (For more on this verse see [Working Out Our Salvation with Fear and Trembling](#)). It’s enough to make one just want to give up, right?

The good news is that we aren’t expected to accomplish this in our own strength or power for God know this is impossible. I love the way E.M. Bounds puts it in his book *The Necessity of Prayer*, “Does God give commandments that men cannot obey? Is He so arbitrary, so severe, so unloving, that He issues commandments that cannot be obeyed? The answer is that, in all of Scripture, not a single instance is recorded of God having commanded any man to do a thing that was beyond his power. Is God so unjust and so inconsiderate to require of man something that he is unable to do? Certainly not. To infer it is to slander the character of Godⁱ.”

So, if it cannot be done within our power, but God is not unjust in commanding it, what must be the answer? The Holy Spirit, of course. But we bear responsibility too.

A long time ago I worked with a friend, Bruce Cook, in preparing some of his teaching entitled *Strategic Faith Planning* (I highly recommend it, by the way). After watching it over and over I came to a

conclusion that the synopsis of that teaching might go like this: **“In all things there are two parts, my part and God’s part. They are not the same, nor are they equal. Here’s the catch – I can’t do His part, and He won’t do mine.”**

In general, **His part is the Power. My part is to Ask (pray), to believe, to watch, to participate, to wait and to rejoice.** In order to rejoice you **have to know that you have a victory** in an area of your life – maybe not complete but at least a step or two forward.

I put together a little “challenge” you might enjoy. I call it the ***Growing in Christ “Love Is” Challenge***. It is based on that “famous love chapter” (the one that’s often read at weddings). Love is patient, love is kind – funny that very few can go past these first two – LOL. Maybe because we can’t even master those two in our own power. The challenge form is found on the USOnow website [here](#).

The intent of the challenge is to allow us an opportunity to honestly assess ourselves against the perfection of Jesus. Then do our part – and see how the Holy Spirit handles “His.” Our part is:

1. Conduct an **honest assessment** of ourselves.
2. **Pray regularly**, asking that the Holy Spirit transform us day-by-day into the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
3. **Expect to be challenged** in these areas in the days ahead for this is how we grow.

*²Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials [temptations],
³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [steadfastness]. ⁴ And let endurance [steadfastness] have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect [mature] and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4*

I remember hearing a sermon once about asking to become more loving. The pastor said, “Be careful asking for this. The way the Holy Spirit causes us to grow in this area is to put the most unloving people in our lives. The ones that are hard to love. That’s how we grow more loving.”

4. **Consider every grievous thing to be an opportunity** to grow in His image (count it all joy). Seek (daily) **the help of the Holy Spirit to pass the tests of faith** that mature us.
5. As you grow, **rejoice and give thanks!**

If the “Love Is” Challenge isn’t your “thing” – how about using the admonitions contained in Ephesians 5:3-5?

- Sexual immorality, impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among (by) you
- No filthiness, foolish talk or vulgar joking

I know a few people that this would be a good challenge... just sayin’.

Either way, as a Believer, if you are sitting down, resting on your laurels, not growing in Christ, **GET UP! You will do yourself and the rest of the Church a great favor if you will get on with your sanctification process. If nothing else, we OWE it to Jesus.**

Maranatha my friends!