**Growth in Christ: Part III**

In an earlier blog, I reviewed man's dilemma after God's judgment post-fall. Adam and Eve were expelled - exiled - from the Garden as self-centered rebels and wanderers. God removed man from His presence. However, from the beginning God implemented His cosmic plan. God would bring a people into His presence. The questions raised include *when* and *how*. Man's expulsion from the Garden was the first exile. If God was to be covenantally faithful, an exodus from man's darkness and bondage must occur. A personal and corporate exodus did come. This was pictured in the Old Testament by God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This event was to be perpetually remembered (Exodus 12:14-17, 24-27; 13:14; 20:1-2). It was a pattern of God's saving grace throughout all ages.

God established a sacrificial system mediated by the high priest. This system - priest, sacrifice, and ritual - pointed to Christ, the perfect Lamb of God and His bloody death (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 7:27). However, unlike the lamb, the crucified Savior rose from the grave as the Conqueror. His resurrection ushered in the new exodus and true resurrection life for each individual and the church. Unless there was a new exodus there would have been no historical exodus.

A radical change must occur in man - not in God - in order for God to bring man into His presence. God accomplished this change in Christ through His work as prophet and priest. The Holy Spirit brings about a change in individuals and the church via His indwelling (Rom. 8:9,11; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:14ff; 1 Peter 2:5ff). This initial radical change is termed regeneration. The magnitude, radical-ness, and comprehensiveness (whole person) of the change is divinely supernatural. The believer's and the church's change is to continue on this earth. This continuation is termed progressive sanctification.

Up to this point many believers would be tracking. Many think of themselves as growers. Two vital questions must be addressed regarding growth: how is it to be done and by what motivation? The how of becoming more like Christ is spelled out in many passages including Romans 13:12-14; Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:8-10. Each of these passages emphasize “putting off “ and “putting on.” This change process involves the whole person. It focuses on changed thoughts, desires, and actions concerning God, self, and others. There is to be a replacement of one thought, one desire, and one action at a time. The person is putting on God- pleasing in lieu of self-pleasing.

The motivation for change focuses on God. He expects and deserves change as the believer develops the character of His Son. Each believer at regeneration had a radical inner-man (heart) operation and change. God the Holy Spirit is the 100% -agent of change (John 3:3-8). In other words salvation is totally of the Lord (Jon. 2:9). The person contributes nothing to his salvation. Understanding this truth is critical to growth in Christ.

As a supernaturally-changed person via the Holy Spirit, the believer has more invested in him by God than the believer has invested in himself. The believer is united with Christ by faith, has the indwelling Holy Spirit, and has the revealed, written Word of God. Out of a real sense of who God is, he embraces who he is in Christ and sets out to please God simply because God is God. He acknowledges that God deserves his devotion and obedience. Also, the believer has a changed view of himself: he is saved from God by God; he is saved from sin and Satan; and he is saved from himself. Out of an awe for who God is and with gratitude for what God in Christ has done to and for him, he will put off self-pleasing habits of thinking, wanting, and doing. He will put on – one thought, desire, and action at a time – God-pleasing thoughts, desires, and actions.

**Application**:

1. Meditate and pray through the above truths.

2. Rejoice in your salvation.

3. According to Hebrews 4:12, make an honest spiritual inventory including the major ways (be specific) that you are a self-pleaser. Ask your spouse or mature Christian friend to critique the list.

4. Commit to replacing those thoughts, desires, and actions with God-pleasing ones.