

Spiritual Maturity vs. Sinful Maturity

2 Peter 1:5-7 and Ephesians 4:17-19 Contrast

What Is This Study About?

We learn best by contrasting one thing to another. This study is a brief summary of how spiritual and sinful living matures. I contrasted 2 Peter to Ephesians 4, but you can also look at Romans 1 for another example of how sinful thinking leads to sinful behavior. Verse 21 tells us these people knew God, but they did not glorify him as God nor did they give thanks to him. Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They rejected God, and God gave them over to their sinful desires. To me, that is the most frightening thing I can think of. I have personally encountered several people that were at this point in their lives. They consciously rejected God and chose to follow their passions.

Sexual misconduct is usually the first passion people seek to indulge themselves in. But eventually, every kind of wickedness is expressed in their lives. When God gives us over and chooses to remove the restraint of the Holy Spirit, we are left to nothing but our sins.

How Will This Help Me?

Sometimes it is easier to identify with our sin than our faith. I trust the Holy Spirit will show you where you are in your faith or your sin. This study has served as a wake-up call for many. I have seen men and women turn pale and look sick as they realized how far they had fallen into sin.

How To Use

The application of this study is very easy to understand. It is meant to be a reflection of your life and to encourage you to draw you back to God if you have strayed. Reflect upon your sin circle and any pitfalls you may have uncovered in your thinking.

Spiritual Maturity vs. Sinful Maturity

2 Peter 1:5-7 and Ephesians 4:17-19 Contrast

The progression of maturity in our faith as shown in 2 Peter is a model for us to follow. In contrast, the progression of sin and self-absorption in Ephesians 4 is a vivid reminder of what sin looks like as it matures.

I was teaching a diverse group of men ranging in age from twenty-five to seventy-five years old about 2 Peter. We had a good interaction, and they were identifying with the passage. I introduced the contrast of that passage with the progression of sin in Ephesians 4 and suddenly, the room was quiet. They read the list and sat there for several minutes. Finally, one man spoke up and said he identified more with the sin side than the faith side. His sin had been hidden from others but present in his life for years. He was pale as he compared his life to the chart. He said, "I am dangerously close to being given over to my sins."

The passage I am referring to is Ephesians 4:17-19 which says, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual

lust for more." Verses 22-24 say, "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, to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Before we go deeper, let's begin by establishing the context of this passage. Paul emphatically insists that the Gentile converts to Christianity no longer live as the Gentiles do. Premarital sex, homosexual intercourse, and idolatry were typically Gentile sins. The Jews were taught to abstain from these sins. The Gentiles, or pagans, were raised to live in this sinful behavior with the belief it was normal. Many Greek boys were ushered into "manhood" by an older man's molestation.

In this passage, we are told to **"put off" the old self** which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and to **"put on" the new self**. It is a picture of taking off filthy clothes and putting on new, clean clothes. The unsaved man lives in this pattern of sin. The saved man can also live in this destructive pattern. He may be saved but still choose to keep on some of his dirty clothes and live part of his life in that filth.

Living by the Flesh vs. Living by Faith

Learning is enhanced when we contrast opposite ideas. In this study, I will not go into depth on the 2 Peter side but will focus on the negative or sin side of the chart. **It is important to note this this sin progression doesn't only apply to an unbeliever but also to a rebellious believer.** As we have discussed, living by faith is to believe something is true, trust in it and be obedient to do it. To walk by the flesh is very similar. You believe you understand what is true. You trust in yourself enough to live out what you believe. You assume control of your life at a foundational level. Everything you do in your life from that point on is dependent upon your ability to understand and control the events and circumstances of your life.

As stated in Study 2, to be in control requires you to have perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future. You do not possess perfect knowledge, but nevertheless, you are determined to be the captain of your fate. You determine to do things "My Way." It is a replay of Adam and Eve in the garden. **A mind that has chosen to not know God -or chosen to limit Him- cannot fully understand the world around him, nor can he understand himself. One obvious reality of this absence is the epidemic rise of fear, anxiety, and depression. It is prevalent in the world and the church (again, we acknowledge that the**

causes of anxiety and depression are sometimes more complex than this).

Darkened Understanding vs. Goodness

The next level of the faith progression is observing all the good things God does and becoming an imitator of those things. When that is rejected, the mind becomes a place of confusion, and understanding is darkened. The unsaved man thinks he is enlightened, and Christians are uninformed. He rejects the Bible and believes in the newest teachings. He is progressive. He may possess great knowledge and have numerous advanced degrees, but he is in the dark. Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so they cannot see God. Without knowledge of their creator, they are often prideful, arrogant, and quick to tell you how much they know. **"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). The person with a darkened mind often defies logic and common sense.** Look at the actions of David with Bathsheba. David clearly was not thinking with the mind of Christ. His lust and passion cast a deep shadow over his godly beliefs, and he did things that were contrary to his beliefs. **Pride and rebellion almost always lead to some form of sexual misconduct.**

Futile Thinking vs. Knowledge

The next faith progression is understanding the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God

is always relational. Without knowledge of God, the defiant or unbelieving man does not have spiritual life. Truth and life go together. The mind of the unsaved person cannot understand the things of God or the world around him. **His thinking is futile (or vain) because it is darkened.** The futile mind is meaningless and lacks purpose because it was created to be in a relationship with God. The mind of the rebellious believer is similar. Unbelief and rebellion limit the knowledge of God in areas of our life we choose to maintain control. **A mind that is darkened and without purpose looks for a means to find purpose. Often that purpose is misguided and shows in controlling people and material possessions and as sexual indulgence.**

Loss of Self-Control vs. Self-Control

Interestingly, the first three levels of the progression of faith are all gifts from God. Faith is a gift. Goodness is a gift. Without Christ, all our works are like filthy rags. There is no true knowledge without a relationship with the Creator of all things. Self-control is the first step after we have believed, trusted, and been obedient to live out our faith in pursuit of His goodness and knowledge. Without this foundation of truth from God, we can't live a life of self-control. Believers are often compared to sheep. Sheep overgraze and do not know how to stop eating without the assistance of a shepherd. We are the same as sheep

in this regard. **We cannot control our appetites for pleasure without the gentle hand of a loving shepherd. The person pursuing sin faces a loss of self-control. The heart becomes hardened or petrified. To be petrified means what was once alive has over time become hard as a rock.**

Loss of Sensitivity vs. Perseverance

To persevere is to hold up under pressure. It is handling the pressures and problems of life with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It does not give up hope. The opposite of this is loss of sensitivity. At this level, sin begins to control life. Because the heart is hard, the ability to feel natural emotions fades. The voice of God fades, the restraint grows faint and indulgence becomes easy. The mind is choosing to yield control to sin.

Let me give you an illustration. The heart in your body pumps the blood to your extremities. The blood is life and without it, everything dies. In the same way, hardened heart to sin is unable to produce life. A person deprived of blood dies physically, and a person deprived of the blood of Christ suffers spiritual death. I want to stress again: this can and does happen to believers who choose to hold onto an area of sin in their life. They are denying the blood of Christ in that area, and death is the result. If you restrict blood flow to your hand by placing a tourniquet on your

arm, you will lose your fingers. The same is true in the spirit.

Given over to Sensuality vs. Godliness

Godliness means God-likeness. It means to be in a right relationship with God and man. For more on this topic, refer to Righteousness and Justice in the 15 Common Pitfalls Study. The contrast to goodness is being **“given over”** to sensuality. Romans 1:28-32 says, “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthy to retain the knowledge of God, **“he gave them”** over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

To be given over to sin is the most horrifying thing I can think of. God politely says “I will remove my restraint from your life at your request and allow you to experience the fullness of the sin you have chosen.” He gave them over to a depraved mind which means to fail the test, to be rejected or unapproved. Remember that God has no pleasure in anyone choosing death. He doesn't want

this for anyone; He wants all to repent and live. But sadly, many choose to reject Him and His ways.

In the Romans passage, did you notice it says when a person believes it is not worth it to hold on to the knowledge of God, they become filled with EVERY KIND OF WICKEDNESS? Is that not a picture of our world today? If they are God-haters, they will hate us as Christ’s followers. Expect it and prepare for it. Verse 24 says He gave them over to their sinful, sexual desires. Sexual indulgence is always a sign of self on the throne and resistance to the ways of God. Also, notice the emphasis on the fact they not only continued in the sinful acts but also approved of those practicing the sin. It is appalling to God when we condone and cheer on the sinful acts of others. If you find yourself in this camp, I strongly encourage you to stop! We must not celebrate, promote and protect sin. If you find yourself disagreeing with God on a topic, you must assume you are wrong. It’s not complicated. He created the world and set things in order and he is always right.

Seduce the Unstable (Predator) vs. Brotherly Kindness

What a contrast of thoughts. Am I showing brotherly kindness to those around me or have I become a predator and a threat to society? **What began as a seemingly simple choice to walk in your flesh ends up as a disaster.** I disciplined young men at a university, and sexual control was

always a big part of the teaching. At the beginning of each semester, our ministry hosted talks on how to survive college life. My topic was how to survive sexually. The class was always full, and the students could not believe we were going to discuss this topic. I would tell them “I am going to begin by answering the question you all are asking: How far is too far?” They wanted to know what was permissible and acceptable behavior for a dating believer. Then I would tell them I actually have a scripture that answers that question. They were always shocked and would try to tell me that’s not in the Bible. I told them it is in there and it is very simple. Treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:2). You are free to treat your girlfriend any way you treat your sister or mother. Yuck! was always the response. It was the truth but not quite what they were looking for.

I also told my guys you are either a protector or a predator. Do you protect women like you would your sister or mother or are you a predator? Are you someone they should fear? If a young woman is distressed over something, do you offer advice and friendship only to gain the right to take advantage of her? **2 Peter 2 talks about false teachers that were experts in greed. It describes them as brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish.** Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they

seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed, an accursed brood! **Experts in greed mean they practiced that skill like an athlete exercises to get better. Eyes full of adultery mean they looked at every girl as a sex object. They were shameless men that were a danger to their society. Are you a protector or a predator? You can’t be both.** If you have daughters, be the man you want other men to be around your daughter.

Immersion in Sensuality vs. Love

Pride and rebellion always lead to greed and lust for power and control over people and material things, as well as to sexual indulgence (I’ll go more in depth about this is Study 4). The desire to be in control always ends in the pursuit of pleasure and sensual self-indulgence. Instead of loving others and desiring they find a relationship with God, the progression of sin ends in self-love. Their pleasure and fulfillment come from the satisfaction of sinful desires. Their highest good and proper aim in life is indulgence. A greedy person is an idolater. An idolater has rejected God and God rejects them.

If you are a follower of Christ and you continue to struggle with the desire for power and sexual indulgence, I encourage you to stop dabbling with sin. Your dabbling will eventually turn into obsession, and you will find it hard to stop. You may think you are choosing to enjoy the pleasure of sin in this part of your life, and all is under control. But I assure you that is a lie.

Satan is playing the music, and you are dancing his dance. You think you are in control, but you are not. He will destroy you, your marriage, and your kids and even try to take your very life if you continue down the road of depravity. The end of sin is always death!