

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL LIVING

TEMPTATION

APPLYING RADICAL AMPUTATION
TO LIFE'S SINFUL PATTERNS



JAY E. ADAMS

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Temptation: Applying Radical Amputation to Life's Sinful Patterns

Lou Priolo, series editor

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P U B L I S H I N G

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The Problem: Slow Growth

One of the most frequent problems that any new convert encounters—and with which older believers still struggle—is a lack of spiritual growth. It seems ever so slow, or often simply fails to appear. There are buds on the fig tree, little figs are apparent, but many never mature and eventually drop from the branches. “Why is my fruit so skimpy and few in number, when that of others is luscious and abundant?” This question, framed in a dozen different ways, is all too frequent.

It is obvious that once God has given a person new life that enables him to believe in Jesus Christ as the One who died for his sins, (Eph. 2:5) that new life doesn’t die—it continues, as does the ability to please Christ throughout the rest of the person’s life, right into eternity. He is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17); everything takes on a new aspect, has new meaning, and ought to produce true growth. But so often growth is stunted. “What is behind this? How can I change so as to produce fruit worthy of offering to God?”

For starters, it’s important to recognize that the forgiveness of sins and one’s eternal salvation is not only an end, but also a beginning. Being justified by faith means that the believer can look forward to the future with assurance that he need no longer fear judgment because Jesus has paid the penalty for his sins. But if fear has ended, what has begun? Where

is the joy of obedient productivity that, according to John 15:5, ought to replace it? That’s the heart of the problem—progress is so slow that many a believer begins to wonder whether or not his faith is real. After all, there ought to be “much fruit,” but the pieces he picks are so small and few in number that he may wonder whether even these are a sign of true spiritual growth. He knows that when the fruit is bad, so is its tree (Matt. 12:33). Something is wrong with him; indeed, he may wonder, “Am I a genuine Christian?”

Do you have this problem—to a lesser or greater extent? Many do.

In what areas of your life is there little fruit (or slow growth)?

What within is the problem? Lack of resolve? Confusion? Inability? Want of knowledge? Or are you not truly a Christian? After all, faith without works is dead. There is one other possibility that you probably haven’t considered—one that could very likely be the root of your problem. It is so important a factor that unless you understand it and put it into practice regularly, it will continue to hinder the growth that you are seeking. In this booklet, I will consider this major element of growth in such a manner that you will be able to recognize it as the heart of your difficulty if that, in fact, is your problem. And we will explain God’s solution to it.

The end, as I noted, is also a beginning. But new elements that are connected with the process of sanctification must be considered in order to ensure growth. The teaching in Chris-

tian circles today tends to offer one of two basic options:¹ (1) inaction on your part in lieu of contemplation and prayer;² or (2) obedience to biblical commands that leads to growth.

Have you approached your sanctification in either of these two ways? If so, which one?

- I tend toward inactivity in lieu of contemplation and prayer, believing that sanctification is an act of God that requires little or no effort on my part.
- I tend toward mechanically obeying the Bible, believing that sanctification is dependent on my efforts.

While the two options are often set in opposition to each other, it is incorrect to view matters that way. Aspects of both must be combined in order to take in the full scope of biblical teaching. It is surely not impossible to consider one's ways, pray about them, and then do what God's Word directs. Moreover, there must be a way to deal with flaws that persistently hold back growth of the luscious fruit of the Spirit that you so earnestly desire. Indeed, it is when one of these two options is missing, out of either neglect or poor decision-making, that you can expect failure. Those who insist on the first option alone incorrectly expect God to do for them what he has bidden them to do. Those who urge the second at the expense of the first fail to lean on God in faith and prayer, instead depending entirely on themselves. They, too, can expect to fail. The old problem of discovering the proper relation of the human to the divine is in play when making such bad choices.

1. These two options take various forms in different overall systems of theology.

2. This option was historically known as *quietism*.