

Theme: False Christian Assumptions

Assumption 3 “If I change my behavior, I will grow spiritually and emotionally.”

Deeply discouraged, Debra approached her house knowing what awaited on the inside: resentful children and a critical husband. No one in the family was getting along, and she shouldered a lot of the blame. Reaching out for help, Debra confided in the wife of an elder in the church. The older woman told her, “Emotions follow behaviors. If you act loving, you’ll feel loving. The Bible tells us to ‘put on the new self.’ That means to behave like a loving Christian. Then you’ll feel like a loving Christian.” Though it seemed dishonest to act differently than she felt, Debra took the woman’s advice. While her husband and the kids enjoyed her bright attitude, Debra still felt depressed.

A. The behavior trap

B. What’s the problem?

1. Changing only our behavior confuses fruit with roots
2. Changing only our behavior forces us first in phariseeism, then into despair.
3. Changing only our behavior denies the power of the cross.

C. How do we grow spiritually and emotionally?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

D. How should we then behave?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why isn't "good behavior" a valid cause of spiritual growth? How would believing this false assumption affect a believer's life?
2. Why do you think God is more concerned with our heart motives than our outward behaviors?
3. Look at the story of the Pharisees and the tax collector that Jesus tells in Luke 18.10-14. What is God saying to you through this parable? What proper behavior could you let go of? What do you need to humbly confess to God?
4. How can wrongly judging outward behavior (your own or someone else's) interfere with the work God is doing in a person's heart?
5. What is the power of the Cross (Philippians 3.10)?
6. Why does changing only our behavior deny the power of the cross (Colossians 2.23)?

Behavior change is the result of spiritual growth, not the cause of it! Even in the times when your behavior feels out of control, God is still doing a deep work in your character and changing you on the inside.

For further study/discussion

Read Philippians 1:9-11

Over and over again, the Bible points out that our actions are the result of spiritual change, not the cause of it. Good behavior is the cart, not the horse. Changes in behavior indicate that God is doing an invisible, internal work within us. Destructive behaviors are not the causes of bad attitudes; they are the result of the heart's sinful condition. Positive behavior comes from God's work in our hearts. This is why changing only our behaviors confuses fruits with roots.

Read Philippians 2:12-13 and Psalms 1:1-3

How should we behave then? In the Bible, God continually compares our spiritual maturity to how plants thrive. Herein is the answer: instead of attempting to fix our symptoms, we must actively take ourselves to good nutrients. Just as a tree planted in rich soil can flourish, so can we expose ourselves to God's healing resources. This is how we take personal responsibility for our spiritual growth. We don't make ourselves grow, we connect to the One Who can make us grow.