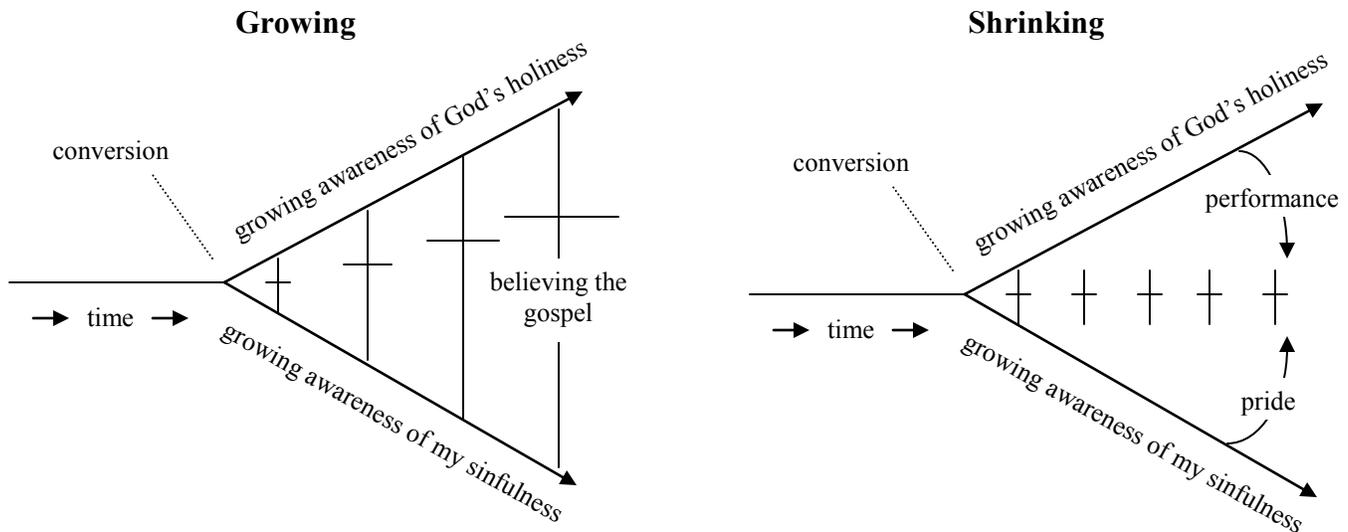


Shrinking the Cross— Performance and Pride

Thirsty
04 SECTION TWO: Naked
10 Attachment 1



The 'Growing in the Gospel' chart helps to show how the Gospel should be functioning in our lives and in contrast the 'Shrinking the Gospel' chart shows how that growth can be stunted. Notice that the top line of the chart is labeled "growing awareness of God's holiness"; this does not mean that God's holiness itself is increasing, for God is unchangeable in his character—he has always been infinitely holy. Rather, this line shows that when the gospel is functioning correctly in our lives, our *awareness* of God's holy character is growing. We realize in fuller and deeper ways the weight of God's glorious perfections.

Likewise, likewise the bottom line shows that when the gospel is functioning correctly in our lives, our *awareness* of our own sinfulness is growing. This does not mean that we are becoming more sinful. In fact, if we are growing in Christ, we'll start seeing victory over sin. But we are realizing more and more "how deep the rabbit hole goes" in our character and behavior as we seek more "sin beneath the sin". We are seeing that we are more profoundly sinful than we first imagined.

As these two lines diverge, and we with faith believe the gospel, the cross becomes larger in our experience, producing a deeper love for Jesus and a fuller understanding of his goodness. At least that's the ideal. But often, because of indwelling sin, we are prone to forget the gospel—to drift away from it like a boat from its moorings. That's why the Bible urges us not to be "moved [away] from the hope held out in the gospel" (Col.1:23). But when we are not anchored to the truth of the gospel, our love for Jesus and our experience of his goodness become very small. We end up 'Shrinking' the cross by either performance or pride.

Performance. Growing in our awareness of God's holiness challenges us significantly. It means coming face to face with God's righteous commands and the glorious perfection of his character. It means reflecting on his holy displeasure toward sin. It means realizing how dramatically short we fall of his standards. *If we are* not rooted in God's acceptance of us through Christ, we compensate by trying to earn God's approval through our performance. We live life on a treadmill, trying to gain God's favor by living up to his expectations (or our mistaken view of them). This seeking to perform diminishes God's holiness by assuming that as fallen people, we could somehow meet his perfect standards apart from the Spirit of Christ within us. It also minimizes the cross and Christ's work on it to take our shortcomings and give to us his righteousness.

¹⁰ Diagrams and portions of the article are taken from *The Gospel Centered Life*, Walker, Will, and Thune, Bob, World Harvest Mission, 2009.

Pride. Growing in our awareness of our sinfulness is not enjoyable, but exceptionally beneficial. It means admitting—to ourselves and others—that we are not as good as we think we are. It means confronting what Richard Lovelace called the complex web of “compulsive attitudes, beliefs, and behavior” that sin has created within us. Often however, we fail to see these things, or in seeing them fail to honestly deal with them. If we are not resting in Jesus righteousness, we can compensate and become deceived into self-righteousness, thinking that we are better than we really are. It takes many forms: dishonesty (“I’m not *that* bad”), comparison (“I’m not as bad as *those* people”), excuse making (“I’m not really that way; I’m just tired or it’s been a long day” etc.) , and false righteousness (“here are all the good things I’ve done”). Because we don’t recognize how sinful we really are, we spin sin in our favor.