

The Cross Chart

The Paradox of Christian Growth

People tell me I'm growing in grace, but I don't feel I'm any better—especially when I consider my thought life (envy, lust, jealousy, greed, a critical spirit, the lot). The truth is, I need the Holy Spirit's power now more than ever. That's the paradox. I know I'm stronger than when I was a new Christian, but I *feel* weaker. Perhaps that's the point. It's just as Paul said: weaker *is* stronger! (1Cor. 15:9)

The chart explained: Before I knew Christ, I was in the dark concerning God's holiness and the magnitude of my sin (the solid grey area on the left). The new birth changed all that. As a babe in Christ, two things began to dawn on me—the absolute holiness of God, and the ugliness of my sin—especially in light of the new life of love to which God was calling me. But, when I made a mess of it, I would repent, look in faith to Jesus, and trust in his righteousness to "bridge the gap" between what I should be and what I was (the small cross).

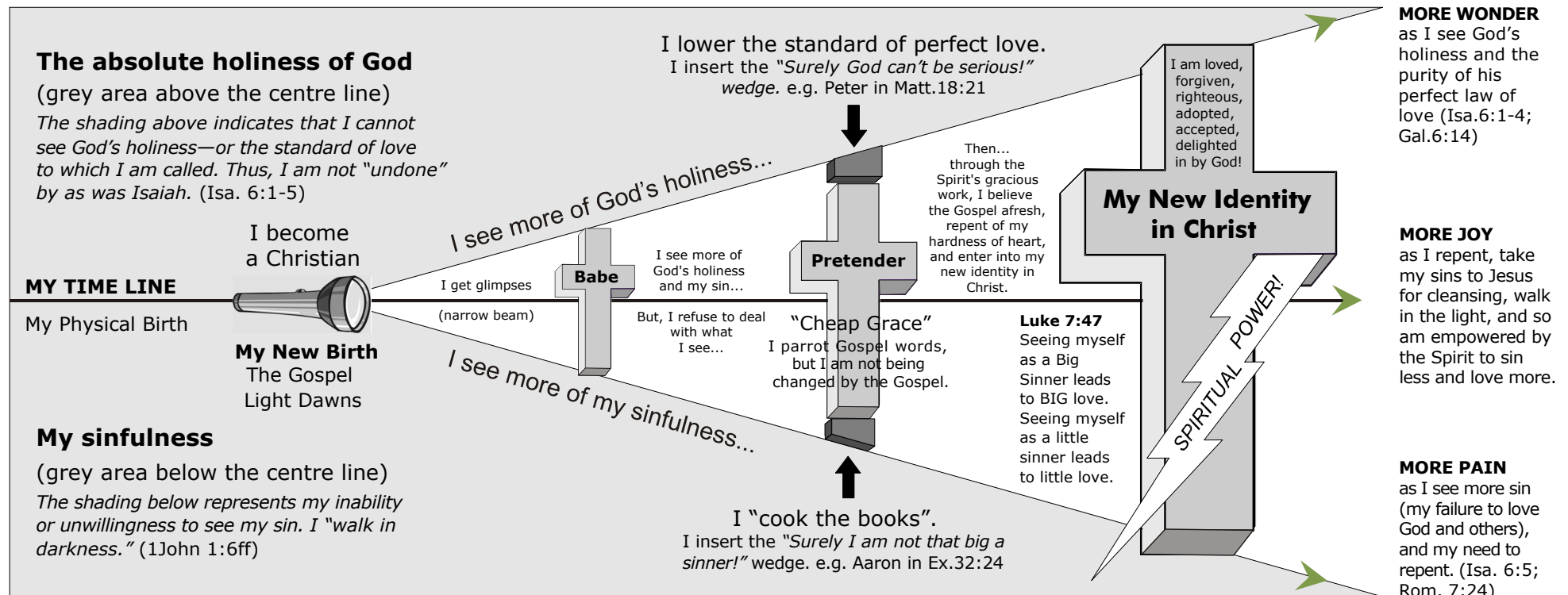
Even today, the battle is in the choosing. Every time I'm exposed as a sinner, I'm faced with a choice.

1. I can try to save face by lowering the standard, rationalising, fiddling the books, shifting the blame, or otherwise making excuses for my shortcomings ("inserting wedges"). At this point, my growth will plateau.

2. Or, in repentant faith, I can bridge the gap by running to Jesus with my sin—"let the Cross grow" (see the large cross). There is no power in the discovery of sin. New life comes as I "work the Gospel"—i.e. as I take my sin to Jesus, rest in my new identity in him, and rely on the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit in me (Gal. 5:22).

READ & DISCUSS Luke 7:36-47 - With which character do you identify - Jesus, Simon, or the woman?

The Cross Chart illustrates the Luke 7:47 principle - that "He who is forgiven much loves much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little."



THE POINT? Spiritual growth comes as I see my sin, admit it, and "let the Cross grow" in my life. The power to change flows from this faith-action of focusing on my identity in Christ.

Concept by Richard Lovelace (*Renewal as a Way of Life*, IVP, page 162); Paul Miller (*Sonship* ©WHM 1988); John Wade Long, Jr. (*SONSHIP for Africa* ©2003 Nairobi & *Grace4Life* ©2009 London). www.Grace4Life.org