

GROWING FAITH AND LOVE

By: Bill Richardson Edited by: Bill Kelly

I'm thinking that it's a technique of writers and yes speakers (teachers and preachers) having a desire of heart to get their readers and or listeners attention do so by using different methods in attaining or fulfilling their desire. I am using a method of old, which may be worn thin by now, and that is by telling a joke or a cute story which may have relevance. Right now I am wondering if I should have told you that I'm going to use a joke to get your attention. So, with the decision already made, I will, and here goes.

"During the word-spelling and words usage in sentence structure in class, young Philip was asked by his teacher to make a sentence using these words illustrating their meanings; DEFEAT, DEDUCT, DEFENSE, and DETAIL. "Young Philip thought for just a moment and said to his teacher, OK...I GOT IT! His teacher complemented him, and then Philip standing straight as a soldier at attention said, "D-FEET OF D-DUCK WENT UNDER D-FENCE B-FORE D-TAIL." The story did not detail the teacher's response to Philip or what grade he was given. With the name "Philip", he had to be a sharp kid and if you do not know he is—just asks him.

It is with words and their proper arrangement that one can convey great thoughts of knowledge and messages of blessed truth and fact. They should be used in proper context and thus great benefit will be the reward to the recipient. The greatest challenge and also fear that I have is proper selection of words which are most needed and have proper meaning by definition and by usage. These are always best for the purpose at hand.

The purpose of this study will be of no more benefit than the value of all the words used to convey thoughts in developing or motivating us to do what is the best and most effective way for us to "Grow Faith and Love." In researching, planning, and formatting a study, there is an inherent need to consider what is involved. Moreover, this need exists as is in this study of growth, faith, and love, and this is true and useful for whatever attribute one would choose to study.

Have you ever heard the expression, "Growing the Church?" Have you ever heard the expression, "Growing Faith and Love?" In any growth process, there is by necessity planting involved. A synonymous word for planting is sowing (plant – sow), and each of these words is synonymous to the other. These thoughts came to mind and this can be an interesting, eventful and fun study, but most of all it will be a knowledge gaining-study that will greatly benefit us. What we must do is put our heart into it.

Do you remember? There are several needed lessons in the scriptures of the Sower. The sower of the word and the parable of the tares of the field were taught beginning in (Matthew 13:36). I recommend reading them with this lesson in mind. There are great lessons for us in the areas of the good and the bad. The good are identified as children of the kingdom, and the bad—they were called the sons of the devil. Does that warrant our attention? I Think so!

There are good lessons about planting and choices which we must make about preparation and about soil conditions. These affect the growth of the seeds planted about faith and love, about growing with diligence and perseverance. This is designed to be strengthening and used by God's children in acts of faithfulness as children of the kingdom.

The parable of the sower is presented by Jesus himself in Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:4-18. I suggest...I entreat you to read and study each of these accounts of the gospels. The parable of the sower sets-up for teachings other related principles that His children need to know. They are in the formula for growing faith and love.

Therein are listed the four kinds of soil, the four kinds of hearers, and about “wheat” and “tares.” In these parables growth of the kingdom is compared, metaphorically, to a mustard seed which are very small, but when it is sown it grows and becomes great and shoots out large branches.

Before Jesus finishes the parable of the sower He tells of a candle under a bushel, (Mark 4:21-22), then Jesus warns us by saying *“Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even that which he has will be taken away”* (Mark 4:24-25) (cf. Matthew 13:22-23; Luke 8:17-18).

Yes, we had better take heed how we respond to the gospel for it is the Book of Life. If we truly obey we will receive great spiritual understanding and will grow in our spiritual lives. Whoever does not, or refuses, either way, it is disobedience and they will lose even the spiritual understanding that they think they have. And Jesus said, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Mark 4:23). Is not that Jesus’ way to say “Those who willingly receive the truth (and it’s a mind thing) will hear?” We hear through our mind via hearing the truth. God’s word is truth...Amen!

Our guard must be against not hearing and not being involved in works of darkness. And our strongest guard against such is an enduring faith and loving God’s word in growing diligence. By dedicated strength against hearing and being involved in works of darkness note Ephesians 5:11 it says, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (rebuke) them.”* What part of “NO FELLOWSHIP” do we not understand? It is not hard to understand—we must! *“Whosoever (Lit. Anyone who) transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the father and the Son. If there comes any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”* (2 John 9-11). (See also John 7:16; 1 John 2:23; 1 Kings 13:16ff; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:11). Faith and love is the tester of transgression. Pray for strength to avoid sin. Pray for growth in faith and love.

The two enclosures below titled, “NOT BY BREAD ALONE” and “WORD POWER”. They are written by Bill Irby - Minister, West Hobbs Street Church of Christ, Athens, AL, are complementary this lesson, and let me tell you! I am compelled to think that you will have a great appreciation for the lesson thought they present.

I am sure that we all will agree that growth in any area of Christ’s doctrine that you would name is right and good. Growth has results and benefits if it’s spiritual. If however, non-scriptural growth/indulgences, or the lack of scriptural growth is a hindrance, then it is terribly sinful. Well, all sin is terrible and we know that, don’t we? The virtues that will produce a strong and diligent faith-growing Christian are listed in 2 Peter 1:5-8, but v. 8 says to us that possessing these is not all. We need, yea; we must be increasing in all our attributes so as to be fruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In v. 9 Peter tells us, *“...if we lack these qualities we are blind and have closed our eyes to the truth.”* We can truly know that if we have eyes to see and ears to hear we must increase (grow) in the truth. And if we don’t hear, know and increase there is growth-hindrance—the wrong kind of growth. It is sinful to lack knowledge or non-growth in faith and love. (See also 1 John 2:11; 2 Peter 1:2-3; 2:20; Philippians 3:8). If we increase in knowledge, we will thus increase in faith and love. The preacher in a recent study said, “KEEP the ‘MAIN THING’, the MAIN THING.” It must be convincing to us, “If there is no growth death will follow.” It can be said another way, “No growth—death inevitable.” It is true; one equals the other. And if one dies in their sin, then what? At death, maintaining or growing faith and love is over. There is no mercy, no forgiving, no make-up time. Death is the beginning of eternity. Here’s the truth of the matter. Growing is manifested in our life here on earth, and it does not happen after death. Growth positively or negatively will happen only here on this good earth and is determined by us in how

and what we do. It is our choice. We must be cognizant of this truth, and spend much time in prayer, study, and exercising our responsibility doing that which we are obligated to do. God's word commands it! "There are two kinds of death—natural and spiritual. Natural death occurs when the breath of life has passed; spiritual deaths are those from whom the breath of the spirit has passed—those steeped in wickedness and sin. The final state of the spiritually dead is spoken of as the 'second death.'" (The Layman's Bible Encyclopedia – p. 188).

Life, death and what ever the length of one's walk in between is God given. The rewards of our walk in life are determined by the choices we make, and by the grace of God. Surely we all know we will, some day, die and that our spiritual life makes or determines by the grace of God, what our final reward will be. Here is some insight from Vine's Expository Dictionary, p. 268, as it is said, "Death is the opposite of life; it never denotes non-existence. As spiritual life is 'conscious existence in communion with God,' so spiritual death is 'conscious existence in separation from God.'"

That thought to me should be considered very, very seriously. Will you consider it? "Death, in whichever sense it is used, is always in Scripture viewed as the penal consequence of sin, and since sinners alone are subject to death (Romans 5:12) it was as the Bearer of sin that the Lord Jesus submitted thereto on the cross (1 Peter 2:24)." That's a quote from Vine's, p.268. My remark to that is, "There is much to be considered and blessings to be gained if we, through growing faith, love, live, and die doing God's Will. If one does not live thusly, they are in sin, as said, **"... the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 6:23).

It is warranted to Christians to grow and stand fast (firm) in the faith, to act like men, and to be strong, (1 Corinthians 16:13); Christians must continue in faith (that too is growth) and encouraging others (Acts 14:22); Christians must be strong in faith and giving glory to God (Romans 14:19-20); Know this—Christians must abound in everything—in faith and utterance (speech) and knowledge and in all earnestness and in love (2 Corinthians 8:7; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4-7); We must be established in the faith and steadfast...(Colossians 1:23; cf. v.6); We must hold fast, keep faith and a good conscience (which is a well trained mind)...(1 Timothy 1:19; cf. v. 5); We need and must pray for increase (growth) in faith (Luke 17:5); We must have and maintain the strongest of faith, the day of judgment will come (the greatest day for the Christian), (2 Timothy 1:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:8; cf. 1:8; 3:13). To be perfect, love has to be made perfect.

That is true. So how is this done? And how is it recognized? What and who is involved? These are more humans involved in worldliness (sin) of unbelief than those that are like Christ. The fact that Christians (tried and true) are like Christ is that God, who is love, lives in Christians. "We, (Christians) *have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him*" (1 John 4:16). Why and how is this done? "By this, *love is made perfect* (1 John 2:5) *with us, so that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so also are we in the world*" (1 John 4:17). *We love, because God first loved us* (1 John 4:19). *Let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God* (1 John 4:7). *The love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him*" (1 John 4:9). Note: "Might live through

Him" is conditional, so as, in this case we would be responsible to do what is required of us. We must know the truth in love. We must live by the spirit of truth and love letting our light shine. We must grow in our love and strength to overcome the world and to gain victory over its sinfulness. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: His commandments are

not burdensome" (1 John 5:6). We must not live by the deeds of the flesh, which are evident and are named in Galatians 5:19-21, but live by the Spirit and the fruit thereof and it is named in Galatians 5:22-24, and in doing so we would be walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Listed first in the fruit of the Spirit is LOVE (Gal. 5:22). Jude 21a, "*Keep yourselves in the love of God...*" please read the rest of the verse, Jude 21b; it tells us what we are to anxiously look for! "*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presents of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen*" (Jude 24- 25). I want to cite a couple more scriptures and then let's give thought to them. These are scriptures used in the sermon by the Preacher in recent past and are on the very subject of this study writing...*"Growth and Love."* You and I do not have the authority to [rank] attributes and commandments, but our Lord and Savior does and He did. Jesus did when He prefaced, in Mark 12:29, the words "*The first of all commandments is: 'HEAR O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, AND STRENGTH.'*" This is a quotation from, Deuteronomy 6:4, as Jesus asked total devotion from His disciples. Total devotion to God is required of us. God is jealous. "*For I, the LORD God, am a jealous God...*" (Exodus 20:5) (cf. Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, Joshua 24:19, and Nahum 1:2). And remember we would be in jeopardy if we were to provoke God to jealousy when we do not give Him the total loyalty that belongs to Him (see 1 Corinthians 10:21-24. Immediately following the first of all commandments, Jesus continued and finished v. 31 by saying, "*There is no other commandment greater than these.*" Can we envision Jesus not even taking a breath between the first and second of all commandments? I can see them fused together and separated only to say—LOVE GOD FIRST BECAUSE HE LOVED ME FIRST, but I, (we), must think of it this way—God first, others second and before self thus we would be third or last. It is said that way in "the first of all commandments." It is a "Thou Shall", which is "imperative", and a true Christian has no other choice as it is necessary and urgent to obedience. If one takes the other choice it would be sin against the God of Heaven, our LORD and Creator. There should be no doubt that the greatest degree of love known to man is told to us in John 3:16. It tells us that God loved us, how much He loved us and the blessing and or benefit we would receive because He loves us, and that is, "*Life everlasting.*" In Romans 5, verse 1 beginning, blesses us with the truth as it says, "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance...*" In vv. 4-8 are the product of perseverance. Please read and study these verses and may we realize the blessings which come from tribulation. And they can be classified as, "*Growing Faith and Love.*" Again this blessing in v. 9 as it says, "*More over then, having now been justified by His blood we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*" Please read vv. 10-11, then praise God and tell Him you love Him and need Him. You will grow in faith and love and will receive blessings from God if you will ask His help. When we study and consider growing in faith and love we get connected to many thoughts, and we should, because we are studying the truth, God's word.

The results in study of truth and love will cause us to realize that we are growing and—in that way, we are being blessed. And yes we are growing in love for the truth, for others, and for self. In Ephesians 4:13-15, Paul is writing to the Saints in Ephesus who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Paul writes, "*...till we all come to the unity of the faith*" (and my understanding of that is, we should walk united in Christ, in the bond of peace, in lowliness and gentleness, longsuffering, [that is showing consideration for others, and fulfill our responsibilities according to the measure of our calling which we were called] "*to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in*

the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:13-15. Now lets read and study giving thought to what Paul says in v. 16 “...from whom the whole body (the Church), joined and knit together by what ever joint supplies, according to the effective working by which ever part does its share causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in LOVE. [What that scripture says IS NOT insinuation, a hint or sly remark, it is not derogatory, and is not innuendo. It is however, TRUTH—His Word is Truth. As the one body, the Church, the scripture is applicable today just as it was when the Apostle Paul penned it. Do we (the Church) need to grow is question that must be asked and answered in the affirmative. Now read 1 Peter 1:22-25.

Here are some defining expressions on “Faith.” “The Greek word (Pistis) meaning FAITH and is defined to say, primarily, firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing (akin to persuade), is used in the N.T always of faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual. The main element in faith is its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from faith in man. These elements are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God’s revelation or truth, e.g., 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; (2) a personal surrender to Him, John 1:12; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender, 2 Corinthians 5:7.” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary, p. 410) Here are some defining words arranged and used in a study by this writer, which was titled, “Love.” “An emotionally guided feeling and genuine (Godly) concern which causes us to act for the good and to satisfy the needs of others and to create the proper influence which will glorify God.”

Here are some defining words arranged and used by this writer, which it is prayerfully hoped that we can have the right understanding of “conscience”. “The well-trained conscience is equal to the knowledge, abiding faith, and love that we expose or subject to our mind”. With confidence, I say that you are studying this lesson with faith and love, and that it will be faith growing and strengthening.

The scriptures and commentary that have been set forth in this lesson have been prepared to help all of us. Scriptures and principles cited, and the thought presented and discussions were to motivate true and honest hearts to gain knowledge and to help us grow and be stronger in the faith. It is my prayer that you read and study this lesson, that you will accept the truth presented herein and that it will be a conscience server (a helper) to you. With confidence, I say that it is your desire to gain more knowledge, which is associated with responsibilities. This creates a desire to seek, to search more diligently, and to accept when found, and associate with and be an active part of abiding faithfully in the Lord’s Church.

The church that I am speaking of cost the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is His Body, His Kingdom, His Church. Please be an obedient dedicated part of the church of the Bible. You cannot pass through Heaven’s gate if you are not in His Body, (His Church), and it is the church, the only Church that you read about in the New Testament. This is the truth—is what the Bible teaches. I invite you to view other writings on the Website, www.geocities.com/dubbyt. There are several writing posted on the Website. I recommend, and I am sure you will want to view the writing, titled, “The Church of the Bible, Christ’s Church”, it has a two-page enclosure, which has the title, “What Must I Do To Be Saved.” Please study both of these, with an honest and receptive heart, for truth and obedience. You will be blessed! God bless you for reading and studying this lesson. God loves you!

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NOT BY BREAD ALONE

By Bill Irby

We know that life has material requirements. A person has to sleep some. We have to eat and drink. A little exercise is also good. This is basic stuff. But and if we attempt to live on an altogether material basis, we will fail. Jesus was being tested by the Devil (Matthew 4:1-11). The first temptation had to do with hunger. The Lord had fasted forty days *and nights* (not the more frequently practiced dawn to dusk fast). He was therefore hungry. The Devil said, "*If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.*" Jesus could have done this. Indeed He could have done anything that suited Him and His purposes. But He had in mind a rebuke for the Devil and a lesson for us. So He answered and said, "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" Notice that Jesus began by saying "*It is written.*" He used this verbal formulation also in verses seven and ten. This expression "It is written" is neither accidental nor ornamental. It is instead full of rhetorical power.

The power of these three words is revealed by a study of the context from Matthew 4:4 is taken. We look back into the Old Testament, remembering that that "*whatsoever things written aforetime were written for our learning*" (Romans 15:4) and see that the quotation is from Deuteronomy 8:3. In this "second law" Moses rehearsed some things with Israel. He reminded them of their history. He reminded them of their history. He reminded them of the Law. And he reminded them that God has taken care of them and blessed them spiritually. But Moses also taught the people. They had been tested with forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The purpose of that test was "to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2). As part of that testing God humbled these people and allowed them to become hungry. Then He fed them with manna, a substance previously unknown to them. This was designed to teach them that "*...man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.*" In addition they saw that their clothing lasted much longer than one could expect and that their feet held up in a remarkable fashion (Deuteronomy 8:4). God took care of them.

Their physical needs were met by God in a situation that would have without His help, spelled doom for them all. So the lesson becomes clear. Just as it is the case that man cannot live without the physical requirements of life, neither can man live without the spiritual requirements of life. The lesson is also that God meets both our physical and spiritual needs. Man needs bread; God provides it. Man needs spiritual bread, the truth. God provides it.

We need what has been written. But we are remarkable creatures in our ability to reject blessings out of a stupid need to exercise autonomy from God. Some people believe that we, that is, humankind, feed ourselves physically. They say, well, we farm, we ranch, we have chicken houses...we do it all. Do we really? The last time I looked, nobody can replicate the process by which one gain of corn becomes three ears. Do we make the chicken lay the egg, or were they made that way? Don't miss it...God feeds us. And God also provides that spiritual food we need in and by His Word. Men reject this, too, just as did Israel in the wanderings (Hebrews 3:7ff.).

Yes, we need bread. But even more we need the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God humbled Israel to teach them this. May we humbly appreciate our absolute need for God in everything and therefore diligently study His Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

WORD POWER

By: Bill Irby

One of the lessons of the book of Genesis is that people organize themselves into groups based on affinity. The greatest apparent point affinity among men is language. Nations are born out of the fact of a common language. Later in the Biblical text nations come to be known by the language they speak.

The language we speak is a fundamental building block in the formation of society. The body politic is derivative of the people's use of language. Americans have a way of understanding ideas that is held (or at least has been held until recently) by most people in the society. For example, we speak of freedom and independence. We know what we mean by these words. Other people use them differently. Dictators use the same words that are used by people in free societies. This contention is proved by the reading of Lenin and Hitler, to mention only two. So, we see that language is strong enough a power to form nations. But the student of the Bible knows that it can do more than this. The proper use of language can save souls. We quote Romans 10:17 all the time: "*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" The danger in being so familiar with a passage is that we overlook its power and profundity. Faith is essential if one is to ever to come to God (Hebrews 11:6).

This text tells us that this required faith comes from the Word of God. Now, this truth is embodied in words, the very things that are the components of language. Language can make nations and some of them free. More importantly, language can make souls free from sin. We remember Paul from Romans 1:16: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth...*" Language may be used for various ends. Its best use is as the gospel of Christ.

The next best use of language is the presentation of the gospel to all who need to hear it. Preaching the gospel is the most significant use of language. If you do not think so, listen to Paul here: "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" and here "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24). Words have many powers. The greatest power of words is to save the souls of the lost. We must both know and share these words.