

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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There is a great need for knowledge and desire of the subject, "Spiritual Growth." Attaining and affecting that knowledge into our life and service is the challenge of this study. After we come to the refreshing knowledge there is an urgent need to make the application to our lives - "that we may grow thereby."

There is no doubt in my heart, and I am sure that we all know the need we have to develop a good working formula and the subsequent use and application in our lives to accomplish the how-to's. Yes, we need to study. There is the need to study the scriptures of God's Word, analyze them, and develop desires. This is great for motivating ourselves to receive the proper dosage or even a double-dose of truth and enthusiasm that we may grow-there-by and be blessed by the intended results.

The first need of this study is selecting and studying of scriptures that express by words indicating "Spiritual Growth." The first scriptures we need to study are in John 15. In reading and studying verses 1-8 we find that we are blessed with the great principle of the vine and the vinedresser. In verse 1 Christ tells His disciples that He is the true vine, and His Father is the vinedresser.

It is for our benefit Jesus is telling us that He is the true vine...the source of all spiritual life for God's people. In the study of following verses we learn that the vinedresser, the Father, removes *every* branch that is His which does not bear fruit. The scripture says that He prunes and takes them away. As terrible as it sounds, the question is why? What's the reason for this? We are told that it causes the fruit bearing branches to bear more fruit. In like manner, God the Father cleanses Christians who are bearing fruit to bring them to bear more fruit.

Fruit is the natural product of a living organism. Spiritual fruit is a spiritual product of a spiritual union. "Spiritual Growth," our lesson, is the fruit bearing strength that the Christian, God's branch, need. We need to grow and to continue to grow. Christian growth results when the knowledge of God's word becomes active responsibilities in our life.

The Spirit, of which we must be aware, is the Spirit we know from the Bible. We are to walk by the spirit. That is to say live by the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 counsels us to walk by the Spirit, and we will not be involved in gratification of the flesh, (which is sin). We *must* develop, by faith and love, and have the habit of continually walking by divine direction of the Holy Spirit. This is the only way of deliverance from selfish lust.

Galatians 5:17 says to us, "*The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.*" By this we learn the flesh opposes the Spirit in an effort to prevent the believer from a life of obedience, surrender, and victory. We must live under the control of the Spirit. It is true and we have to confess it. Confessing it yes, but we must let it have its way in our lives. We must realize that we have to keep and maintain our lives through the *dedicated growth process*. Our strength, desire, and determination must yield to the Spirit and not the flesh. The Vinedresser provides our strength.

Note the principles and counsel of Romans 8:5-11:

5. *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." (Let us set our minds to think, to will, and to do the things of the Spirit. We will be blessed! He will be pleased.)*
6. *"To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Life and peace comes from God. Serve God.)*
7. *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot." (Enmity to God is hostility. Do not oppose God, but seek to please Him. Grow Spiritually!)*
8. *"Those in the flesh cannot please God." (We can please, if we live right.)*
9. *"You however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him." (That is the active ingredient. Don't you think so? We must have the Spirit of Christ...Christ likeness, or He will not accept us, or we don't belong to him. What's tragic is; it's preached to us, it's said and we relate to it in Bible study. We write about, and we repeat it, and still there is unbelief, which is disobedience, and still there is un-acceptance. The results, in my case, my soul is in jeopardy! I need help, I need strength, I need a double-dose.)*
10. *"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Even if Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit, our physical bodies still must die because of sin. But the indwelling Spirit assures us of eternal life because we have been justified by Christ. God will also raise our mortal bodies to a glorious new life at the resurrection. Praise God!)*

If we grow, and we must, is what this study is all about and for good cause. Growth is increasing. Increase is gain and thus rewarding. It is also addition. Spiritual growth adds much and various attributes to one's life. We are to desire it. As said in (1 Peter 2:2 ESV) *"Like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation."* We should feed on the word of God so that we *can* grow spiritually. The person who has experienced God's grace in Christ will desire to *grow* in it. That is the gist of 1 Peter 2:3.

2 Peter 1:3-11 we read, *"His divine power has granted to us all things that provide to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promise, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement, (add to), your faith virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge*

with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affections with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks the qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore brother, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way, there will be provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

Now the other side of the coin...as the saying goes. I say that because we need to discuss some of what retards our spiritual growth. Have you ever heard the expression, “We are our own worst enemy?” I used myself as example in one of my study writings a couple of years ago by relating to an incident in my work when I messed up. When my boss reprimanded me, he looked up over his glasses and the first thing he said to me was, “You shot yourself in the foot, didn’t you Bill?” I took his question to be a rhetorical question. I confess that it was my fault, my failure, and mine alone, and with my apology he said no more.

With that said, here is the question, “What are the hindrances to our spiritual growth?” For thought purposes and discussion, let’s look to the “Word” then make our confession. In my high school days our debate teacher told us, “There is no such thing as a legitimate excuse!” Mr. Thompson loved to debate that theory. He convinced us of it, but we never did let him know that.

On hindrances to our spiritual growth we must be aware of our associations and conduct. We are warned, *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”* “...Bad company ruins good morals” (1 Corinthians. 15:33). Paul is warning the Corinthians to avoid evil company. *“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, as ye are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us”* (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

In 2 Corinthians 6:17 we are admonished to have a life separated from sin as it is said, *“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”* This is the warning against sinful or immoral life. If we associate with the wrong crowd they can weaken or destroy our spiritual growth. Conversely strong Christian friends and associations will be very helpful to our growth in Christ.

These qualities and blessings keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be diligent in practice of these qualities and in doing so we will never fall. In this way we are provided an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior.

In 1 Timothy 4:7 we are admonished to exercise ourselves toward godliness. We must exercise by diligently living according to the truth of the gospel so that we will grow spiritually. How do we exercise spiritually? We exercise spiritually by doing. Here is how! Our life of growth is attained by being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that we follow, in “doing”. We learn to do more proficiently and diligently by practice and exercise.

I want to cite (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV) and collect a couple thoughts from it. It says, *“All scripture is breathed out of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for*

correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” [If a Christian, a member of the Lord’s Church, uses an excuse for “whatever” reason, trying to justify not growing spiritually, or for that matter, not growing period, they do not; repeat—do not, have an acceptable excuse for such. There is none!]

Look (again) with me to 2 Peter 1:3, and 1:8-9. Remember, Peter is writing these great truths by inspiration, and in verse one he says, “...*To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” He is addressing Christians, members of the Lord’s Church and he is speaking on specific subjects, but multiple exhortations.

In 2 Peter 1:1-21, the entire chapter, is an exhortation to spiritual growth. Now note what he says in 2 Peter 1, verse 3, and give serious analyzing thought to what is said. It reads, “*His divine power has granted, (given), to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to, (by), His glory and excellence, (virtue).*” The divine power God revealed is the earthly life, death on the cross, and resurrection of Christ. That is the Gospel. For the knowledge of the beginning of the gospel, read Mark 1:1-15.

Does man or can man fully comprehend the power of God? Do I, a Christian, a servant of Jesus Christ and my fellowman, fully realize what God has said to me, through the bondservant Peter in the 3rd verse of 2 Peter 1? *God’s divine power has given to me all...God’s divine power is ours through our personal knowledge of Him. My knowledge of God is the knowledge of His word, and any hindrance to Spiritual growth is my misgiving, my sin, and mine alone. I am responsible to grow and bear fruit.*

Reference has been made to all of 2 Peter, Chapter one. But for emphasis and acknowledgement each of us must with commitment grow as Christians by cultivating the characteristics listed in vv 5-7 as they admonish us to, “...*give all diligence, add to, (that’s growth), your faith virtue, (desirable quality), to your virtue knowledge, (understanding), to knowledge self-control, (restraint/discipline), to self-control perseverance, (determination), to perseverance godliness, (righteousness), to godliness brotherly kindness, (concern for fellow Christians), and to brotherly kindness love*” (demonstrate love by concern in the well-being of all people).

We will be frightened, (as well we should), when we come to the knowledge that these qualities and blessings from God are ours by His (Grace). They will increase and grow in our lives; but if we are not accepting them and using them to the Glory of God, and not growing or (increasing) them then the question must be asked...why? We must realize...if these wonderful qualities and blessings are in our lives, we are stewards of them. We are not growing and increasing them in our walk with the Lord it is questionable, and there must be changes made. If they are in your life and are growing, God bless you!

Anytime the New Testament speaks of the duty and obligations of man to God our Creator and of man’s obedience to God, it is referring to, and includes whatever action God specifies as necessary. This is true and has been pointed out in the scriptures cited in this study of “Spiritual Growth.”

Carnality is a hindrance to Christian growth. Notice what Paul said in (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). He addressed the Corinthians as brethren and telling them he could not speak to them as Spiritual people but as carnal, as to babes in Christ. Although they (the

Corinthian) were Christians Paul said that they were not fully spiritual. They had not grown spiritually as they should. They did not live in full obedience to the Spirit. For where there is envy, strife and divisions, are you not carnal, and behave like mere men? Paul questioned! The conclusion is that they were not mature in their *faith*. Can this be said of me and you? If we are not mature, it is known that growth is lacking. And we are studying about "Spiritual Growth."

The sin of envy, strife and division over preachers (which was the Corinthians problem), or any other thing for that matter is denying the heritage which should be the greatest of all joy to Christians. 'O my goodness! Look with me to (Ephesians 4:11-16 as it provides the formula for Christians. (I'm paraphrasing) here. The Saints are counseled to equip themselves for the work of ministry. They should be building up the Body of Christ. We all must attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to "mature manhood", and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be Christians, tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunningness, or by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

We must speak the truth in love. We must *grow up* in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly, it causes (makes) the Body to grow so that it builds itself up in love, and if we live and walk in the ways we are admonished in the verses of (Ephesians 4:11-16), there would be *unity* among and throughout all of us!

Speaking to maturity of faith... let me say this and it is not original by me: When the New Testament speaks of working, mature, or perfect faith, it is referring to faith that includes whatever action God specifies as necessary. This is made clear in (James 2:22) as said: "*Do you see that faith was working together with His works, and by works faith was made perfect?*"

Speaking to unity...note this admonishment from the publication, Seeking The Old Paths: "The only way to unity is faithfulness to God and to hold tenaciously to the teachings, and to '*speak as the oracles of God*' (1 Peter 4:11). There must be Bible authority for what we say, believe, and practice, because the Bible is the sole authority. Unity based upon truth is the only true unity. The plea shall never be outdated nor irrelevant. It is our sacred duty before God and man to uphold this plea regardless of the cost to ourselves and those around us."

We have studied and referenced good scriptures sufficient to show the need for Spiritual Growth. My prayer is that we have, yea in this study grown spiritually, and have effected in our hearts greater faith and love to eliminate the hindrances to our growth by having related to, and the study of them also. But there are more thoughts and knowledge blessings that I want to list for our continued individual and private study in our daily Bible study. And even all of these and their associated thoughts are not representative of an exhaustive list or study:

Spiritual growth in Grace: (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) (2 Corinthians 3:18) (Philippians 3:12) (Colossians 1:10, 2:18-19).

Spiritual growth through the Armor of God: Romans 13:12) (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) (Ephesians 6:10-17) (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Spiritual growth through overcoming sin: (Romans 13:12) (1 John 5:4) (Revelation 3:21; 12:11).

Spiritual growth through confessing sin: (Luke 15:17-21) (James 5:16) (1 John 1:9).

Spiritual growth through positive Action: (Matthew 6:14-15); 18:21-22) (Romans 12:10-21) (1 Peter 3:8-9) (1 John 17, 18).

Spiritual growth through prayer: (Psalms 32:6; 145:19-19) (Matthew 6:5-13) (Ephesians 6:18) (Philippians 4:6) (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

This study is closed with the following comments: “The scriptures and commentary that have been set forth in this study have been of great benefit to me. The wonderful scriptures and principles that we studied together have been motivating to my conscience. It is my prayer that you have read and studied this lesson, and that you will accept all truth herein, and that it will be a conscience server to you also. Accepting truth and acting responsibly is truly a great blessing.

“The well-trained conscience is equal to the knowledge, abiding faith, and love that we expose or to which we submit our mind. With confidence I say that you studied this lesson with faith and love, and that it will be of great benefit to you.

“With confidence I also say, that you desire to be blessed and to gain more knowledge. True abiding biblical knowledge is associated with responsibilities. In faith and love please seek and search diligently for responsible knowledge. It is found, in the study of God’s word, the truth. Please accept it as your duty—your obligation. Your duty must be associated with and become an active part of your abiding faithfully in the Lord’s Church until death.

“The church that I am speaking of is [the church you read about in the Bible. The cost was the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The church is His Body, His Kingdom, which is 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 Christ’s’ Body, His Church. It surely is the Church, the only Church that you read about in the Bible. That is the truth. Note more of what is said in the Bible about truth and the church.

“*Buy the truth, and sell it not*” (Proverbs 23:23). Do not compromise the truth. Where the Bible speaks definitively on a subject, we must be firm in our resolve concerning that truth. The Bible speaks clearly as to the number of churches having a scriptural right to exist. ONE! Jesus promised to build His church, not “Churches” (Matthew 16:18). On the day of Pentecost, the saved were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Paul said there is one body (Ephesians 4:4). Earlier in the same epistle Paul equated that body with the church (Ephesians 1:23). Later, Paul uses 12 nouns and pronouns to describe the church—all of them singular (Ephesians 5:23-32). This settles the matter of how many churches Jesus built and how many existed in the New Testament.

“We must not be ashamed to say what the Bible says on this subject (Mark 8:38). Let us all prepare ourselves to speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). Anything less is to do God and His word a terrible injustice.

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