

Spiritual Growth

From “Light from the Word” in *The Silver Lining*. Reprinted with permission.

Achieving true spiritual growth is a noble motive in a believer’s life. The Bible encourages believers to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). They are also exhorted to “*go on unto perfection*” (Heb. 6:1).

Spiritual growth is a simple, uncomplicated concept. “*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*” (James 4:8). How does one draw nigh to God? There is an age-old formula that never fails and is as applicable for today’s modern times as it was in Bible times. Namely, engage in sincere and fervent prayer, consistent serious reading of the Word, heartfelt participation in the church (worship, fellowship, singing, and other activities) and be zealous in good works. Growth and discernment are further enhanced by nonconformity to the world so that one can better understand God’s perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2).

God does not reveal himself to the wise and prudent. Rather, he reveals himself to those who are humble of heart (Matt. 11:25). The Apostle Paul stressed that he came “*not with excellency of speech or of wisdom*” and that he was determined only to know “*Christ, and Him crucified*” (1 Cor. 2:1,2).

Desire for growth must be motivated by love for Christ and the brethren (1 John 3:16). Charity is supreme. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing*” (1 Cor. 13:2). Further, the believer is taught *above* all to “*put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*” (Col. 3:14).

As one turns to the Lord in repentance and becomes converted, the warmth and holiness of God’s Spirit provides a deep, “first love” relationship with Christ and His body, the church. There is danger that this spiritual well-being can fade as the lures and cares of the world become more pronounced. To help prevent this possibility, the Apostle Paul exhorted believers to attain “*full age*” and “*have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” through use of the strong meat of the Word (Heb. 5:13-14).

Spiritual growth aims for several basic objectives. First, spiritual growth will give the believer wisdom to recognize evil influences and strength to resist diverse temptations. Spiritual growth and maturity will result in a life of obedience that is pleasing to God. In addition, as one prospers in true spiritual growth, his life will more profoundly reflect the light of Christ, and he will be a better example to unbelievers, and a greater encouragement to fellow believers.

Spiritual growth should not be considered an end in itself, but rather a means to an end: being fruitful and overcoming temptation until life’s end. Knowledge alone is not growth. Without charity, it may be a detriment (1 Cor. 8:1). Only as knowledge is applied in everyday Christian living does it constitute growth. This provides visible evidence of genuine service for Christ, who said, “*by their fruits ye shall know them*” (Matt. 7:20).

If the Bible knowledge a believer gains does not change his life by making him more humble, more obedient, and more sanctified, he has merely looked into a mirror and walked away, apparently having forgotten what he saw (James 1:22-24).

Familiarity with the Word should not lead to overconfidence. *“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12). *“Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits”* (Rom. 12:16).

The pursuit of spiritual growth and godly insight should not result in a highly individualistic interpretation of Scriptures. Increased spiritual understanding by each member should coordinate with the functioning of the entire body of Christ. The church is *“fitly framed”* and *“... together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord”* (Eph. 2:21). Believers are *“builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit”* (Eph. 2:22). True spiritual growth enhances the fulfillment of the scriptural role of the church here on earth, bringing glory to God.

Some of the specific and very noticeable results of true spiritual growth are: humility, peace, contentment, and obedience. These attributes often develop most effectively as a result of enrollment in the school of experience.

Humility requires development of a proper concept of one’s self, which is neither extreme of exalting or degrading of self. *“By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life”* (Prov. 22:4). *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up”* (James 4:10). Humility allows us to gain wisdom (Prov. 11:2) and receive grace (1 Peter 5:5).

Paul implied that through many experiences he grew in contentment. *“For I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Phil. 4:11), and... *“godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim. 6:6). As believers walk each day in truth and light, realizing their sins are forgiven and they are at peace with God and man, they have great reason to rejoice and be glad. Contentment is a vital component of growth.

Obedience is another crucial aspect of growth. True Christian maturity cannot exclude obedience to God, to His Word, and to Christ’s body, the church. *“... but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments”* (Matt. 19:17). *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”* (Ecc. 12:13). Thus, these two Scriptures indicate that one should abide by the standards of the Word if he claims to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of God. Moreover, a child of God has an obligation to reflect obedience by submitting to the guidance of those who are over him in the Lord (Heb. 13:7,17). Believers must also submit to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21).

May our sincere desire for spiritual growth be to *“... come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13).

This article appeared in the “Truth for our Time” column in the “Christian Friendship Messenger”, and is prepared by the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) Communications Committee. Comments or questions can be directed to: ACCNcommunications@gmail.com