

Spiritual Growth

by A.B. Simpson

Spiritual growth is the result of receiving Christ as our indwelling sanctifier and life, and giving all diligence to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, etc., in perfect proportion and harmony.

Scripture: Luke 2:40, John 1:16, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 2:12-13, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 1:3-11, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the necessity of spiritual growth in the Christian life, drawing parallels between physical growth and spiritual maturity. He explains that true growth stems from sanctification, which is the indwelling of Christ in believers, and that it requires diligent effort and the use of divine resources. Simpson highlights the importance of harmonizing various Christian virtues, suggesting that growth is not merely additive but should create a beautiful, cohesive life of faith. He warns that stagnation in spiritual growth can lead to decline, while growth is essential for security and steadfastness in faith. Ultimately, he assures that the struggles of this life will lead to a glorious reward in the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Transcript

"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."-2 Peter iii 18.

I have heard of a little boy being found by his mother in one of the garden beds with his feet buried in the soil, and standing beside a tall sunflower, to which he was eagerly looking up. When his mother asked him what it all meant, he said that he was trying to grow to be a man, and wanted to be as tall as the sunflower. How truly has our Master said of all our struggles to grow taller, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" All the little fellow's stretching did not increase his height. No doubt his mother told him to go inside and eat a good hearty supper, and day by day drink plenty of fresh milk and eat his meals with heartiness, and run about and play for wholesome exercise and be a happy, thoughtless child, and thus he would grow to be a man without trying. His desire to grow would not really help him to grow unless he took the proper means.

It is just so in our spiritual life. Fretting and straining will not enlarge our spiritual manhood. God has Himself revealed the secret of growth, and it is not very different from the mother's counsel to her little boy.

Let us look at some principles of spiritual progress.

I. THE RELATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH TO SANCTIFICATION.

The apostle who has given us our text had already laid down the principles of spiritual growth in the opening chapter of his epistle with great fullness and marvelous clearness and power. There is no single paragraph in the Scriptures which more profoundly unfolds the depths and heights of Christian life than the first eleven verses of the first chapter of 2nd Peter. And the very point we are now referring to is made perfectly plain in these verses. The fifth verse is an injunction to grow in grace, but the preceding verses give us the standpoint from which this growth is to start. It is nothing less than the experience of sanctification. The persons to whom this is addressed are recognized as having already "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," and having already "become partakers of the divine nature."

These two facts constitute the whole of sanctification. It is that experience by which we become united to Christ in so divine and personal a sense that we become partakers of His nature, and the very person of Christ, through the Holy Ghost, comes to dwell in our hearts, and by His indwelling becomes to us the substance and support of our spiritual life. The converted soul is a human spirit born from above by the power of the Holy Spirit. The sanctified soul is that human spirit wholly yielded to and wholly possessed and occupied by God's indwelling presence, so as to be able to say, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me." The effect of this is to deliver from "the corruption that is in the world through lust." God's indwelling excludes the power of sin and evil desire, which is just what the word lust means. The Greek tenses here leave no room to doubt the question of time and the order of events. This deliverance from corruption precedes the command to grow, and is the very ground of that command. For the word translated "besides this," as Alford so happily shows, means something entirely different namely, "for this very reason," that is, because God hath provided for our sanctification, and imparted to us His nature and delivered us from the power of sin, for this very reason we are to grow.

It is very evident, therefore, that we do not grow into sanctification, but grow from sanctification into maturity. This corresponds exactly with the description of the growth of Christ Himself in the opening of the gospel of Luke. "The child grew and waxed strong in spirit filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him." Surely no one will dare to say that He grew into sanctification. He was sanctified from the very first. But He was a sanctified child and grew into manhood. And so still later, in Luke ii: 5, it is added that, at the age of twelve years, "Jesus grew in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man."

And so the same Christ is formed in each of us; is formed as a babe and grows, as He did on earth, into maturity in our spiritual life, and we grow into a closer union with Him, and a more habitual and intimate dependence upon Him for all our life and actions.

Beloved, have we come to the starting point of spiritual growth by receiving Christ as our indwelling sanctifier and life?

II. THE RELATION OF GROWTH TO THE PROVISIONS AND RESOURCES OF DIVINE GRACE.

The same beautiful passage brings this out also in great fullness and definiteness. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to His glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Here we are taught that God hath provided all the resources necessary for a holy and mature Christian life. These resources are provided for us through the graces and virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we are called to receive and share. "He hath called us," not to our glory and virtue, but "to His glory and virtue." It is the same thought which the same apostle expresses in his first epistle, ii: 9, "That ye

should show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Not, "the praises of Him," which is obviously a bad translation, but "the excellencies." We are to display the excellencies of Jesus to the world, or, as it is here, "The glory and virtue of Jesus." He clothes us with His character and in His garments, and we are to exhibit them to men and to angels. And these provisions of grace are brought within our reach through all "the exceeding great and precious promises," which we may claim and turn into heavenly currency for every needed blessing.

This is the conception of Christian life given in the first chapter of the gospel of John, in that wonderful little expression "grace for grace." That is to say, every grace that we need to exercise already exists in Christ, and may be transferred into our life from Him, as we "receive of His fullness, even grace for grace." Up in yonder mount Moses was called to see and study a model of the Tabernacle, corresponding in a higher degree to the models which you may see in the Patent Office in Washington of all the different machines that have been patented and built. A few weeks later the same Tabernacle might be seen going up piecemeal in the valley below, and, when completed, was an exact facsimile of the other shown to Moses in the mount; for God's explicit command was, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shewed thee in the mount." Corresponding to this is the tabernacle which God is building in each of our lives. It is just as heavenly a structure as the other and far more important, and is meant to be, as it is, the dwelling place of God. It, too, has its model in the mount, and we may see, by the eye of faith, the model of our life, the pattern, the plan of all the graces which we exemplify and the life which is to be built up, worked out, and established. All the materials for our spiritual building are there now, already provided, and the whole design fully wrought out in the purpose of God and the provisions of His grace. But we have to take these resources and materials moment by moment, step by step, and transfer them into our lives. We have not to make the graces ourselves, but take them, wear them, live them, and exhibit them. "Of His fullness we receive grace for grace," His graces for our graces, His love for our love, His trust for our trust, His power for our strength.

Over in an English factory you can find numerous models of iron cottages, composed of hundreds of sections screwed together, and standing just as they would appear when erected on their permanent site. The purchaser from a distant colony, where wood is scarce and metal has to be used instead, comes along and purchases one of these cottages, and orders it to be shipped to Australia, with the understanding that it shall correspond in every particular to the model in the London yard. The order is fulfilled, and a few months later you may see the identical facsimile in a pleasant lawn in Melbourne or Sydney, or a few weeks sooner you may see the sections arrive piece by piece, and the different pieces screwed together until the building is complete, and corresponds in every particular to the London model. All the materials have been sent from the distant city, and the structure reared according to the model, piece for piece. This will illustrate what John meant by "grace for grace." Christ has, in Himself, the pattern of your life and mine, and all the materials. Our part is simply to receive, live out and exemplify them before the world.

III. RELATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH TO OUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY AND EFFORTS.

While it is true, on the one hand, that all the resources are divinely provided, this does not justify, on our part, a spirit of passive negligence, but summons us all the more to diligence and earnestness in pressing forward in our spiritual career. And so the apostle adds, after this strongly emphasized enumeration of the resources of God's grace, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith," etc. There is to be no languid leaning upon God's grace, no dreamy fatalism, based upon His almighty purpose and power, but a strenuous and unceasing energy on our part in meeting Him with the co-operation of our faith, vigilance and obedience.

In fact, the very provisions of God's grace are made, by the apostle, the ground of his exhortation to give earnest attention to this matter. For this very reason, that is, because God has so abundantly provided for us, and is so mightily working in our lives and hearts, and developing us from the power of sin, for this very reason, "Add to your faith," etc.

It is the same thought which Paul has expressed in Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure." This does not mean that we are to work for our salvation, for we are represented as already saved, otherwise it could not be "our own salvation." But it is yet in embryo and infancy, an inward principle of life which must be worked out into its full development and maturity in every part of our life, and to this we are "to give all diligence," a diligence, indeed, which often reaches the extent of fear and trembling," a holy and solemn sense of responsibility to make the most of our spiritual resources and opportunities, because "it is God that worketh in us." It is as if, with the finger of solemn warning raised, He were standing and looking into our eyes and saying, "God has come. The Almighty has taken this matter in hand. The Eternal Jehovah has undertaken the work, therefore, mind what you do! Let there be no laxness, no negligence, and no failure on your part to meet Him and afford Him the utmost opportunity to fulfill in you all the good pleasure of His will, and the accomplishment of His high and mighty purpose for your soul."

In our Sunday school lesson, within the last few weeks, we have had a very solemn thought, whose most impressive point has perhaps escaped the thought of some of us. It is in connection with the parable of the pounds, and the thought we refer to is the obvious truth there unfolded, that to every servant is given, at the beginning of his spiritual life, an equal measure of spiritual resource, and that the difference in the issues of human lives is not to be found in the unequal measure of grace and power afforded from on high, but in the unequal measure in which they have improved the power given. One pound is given to each servant, but in the end, one servant has so traded with his pound that it has grown to ten, while his neighbor has the same little pound wrapped up in a napkin, unchanged, unimproved. The difference lies wholly in the diligence of the two men. The one "giving all diligence" added to his faith virtue, knowledge, temperance. The other simply tried to keep what he got and probably took excellent care of it, wrapping it in a costly handkerchief maybe, or putting it into a secret drawer or worthy place, but doing nothing to increase it. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man," the apostle says, "to profit withal." This expression, "to profit," carries the same idea with it as the trading in the parable of the pounds and the "all diligence" of Peter's epistle.

Beloved, are we "giving all diligence" to make the most of God's divine resources, of "the exceeding great and precious promises," of "the divine nature" within us?

IV. THE RELATION OF THE VARIOUS DETAILS AND THE RESPECTIVE GRACES OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE.

The verse employed to describe our spiritual progress is a very unusual one and full of exquisite suggestiveness. It is a musical figure, and we all know that there is nothing that so perfectly expresses the idea of harmony and adjustment as music. Paraphrased into the English meaning of the figure the passage might thus be read, "Add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, etc., just as in a perfect musical harmony one note is added to another until the majestic Hallelujah Chorus swells to heaven without a discordant part or measure wanting.

In the Greek national festivals it was customary for some prominent and gifted individual to get up a chorus or special musical entertainment, and the one to whom this high trust was committed was called the "Choregos." From this our word choir has been derived. He was really the choirmaster and his business was to combine together the voices, the instruments and the musical compositions in such a manner as to produce the most perfect effect and the most complete harmony. So the Greek verb based on this word, "Epichorego," just means to combine together as a musical harmony, or as a choir-master would combine the notes, the instruments, the voices and all the parts in a splendid performance. This is the beautiful verb imperfectly translated. A dry figure of arithmetic is unhappily substituted for a suggestive musical metaphor.

Perhaps we have already anticipated the fine thought lying back of this figure, viz.: that God wishes our Christian growth to be like the growth of a sublime oratorio, a growth in which all the parts are so blended and the entire effect so harmonious that our life will be like a heavenly song or a Hallelujah Chorus. Faith is the melody, but to this is added all the other parts, courage which reaches the high tenor, temperance perhaps the medium alto, patience the deep bass, and knowledge, godliness and love, the song itself, to which all the music is but the accompaniment. It is easy to grow in one direction and to be strong in one peculiarity, but only the grace of God and the power of the Divine nature within can enable us to grow up to Him in all things, "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." It is one thing to have faith and courage, but it is another thing to have that blended with temperance and love. It is one thing to have self-restraint, but it is another thing to have it combined with knowledge. It is one thing to have brotherly kindness, but it is quite another to have charity to all men. It is one thing to have godliness, but it is another to have it in perfect adjustment with love. It is the harmony with all the parts which constitutes the perfection of the song and the completeness of the Christian life.

Beloved, perhaps God has educated you in each of the graces, but He is now educating you in the blending of these graces in perfect proportion, so that your love will be rendered mellow and like a perfectly proportioned face, not so marked in any of its single features as in the whole expression of the countenance. Indeed, the most beautiful faces are sometimes so proportioned that we can scarcely remember a single feature, and perhaps the best musical compositions are those which leave the simplest effects and are less striking for any particular measure than for the exquisite sweetness and simplicity of the whole. This is the heavenly meaning brought out in the preposition "in" all through this progression. It is not add to your faith courage, but "in your faith courage, knowledge, temperance, etc." It is in the intermingling and the tempering of one grace with another that the power of the whole consists. It is the addition of courage along with the faith which renders the faith effectual. It is the addition of self-restraint along with patience which keeps it from becoming fanaticism, and zeal without knowledge. It is in the quality of temperance and self-control combined with knowledge that the elements of discretion and wisdom are developed. But self-control and self-denial need patience to save them from being transitory outbursts and to give them permanence and stability. All these qualities without godliness would leave us on a low plane, but this lifts them all to heaven and makes them all a living sacrifice upon the altar of His glory. But even godliness alone would leave us narrow and cold, and so God requires of us the inner linking with our brethren and the culture of these social qualities, which brings us into loving fellowship with one another and lifts us out of ourselves into brotherly kindness, that is the love of the brethren, the love of Christ's people. And yet even this would not be complete if the circle were not widened far beyond the range of Christ's people and our brethren in the Lord, to comprehend the whole world in the sweep of a charity which can love even as God loves, the unworthy, the unattractive and even those that hate us and repel us.

It is very beautiful to notice the fine shades of holy character which the New Testament expresses. For example, what a multitude of words the Holy Spirit has given us for the various forms of love and patience. Here are some of them: love, charity, brotherly kindness, tenderness, meekness, long-suffering, patience, forbearance, unity, peace, courtesy, gentleness, considering one another, in honor preferring one another, kindly affectioned one to another, etc. They are like so many fine shades of color, all of the same class, yet no two exactly the same. Thus God is tempering our lives and this is a very large part of Christian growth.

It is said that a great sculptor was visited by a friend twice, at an interval of several months. The friend was astonished to find that his work seemed no further on. "What have you been doing?" "Why," he said, "I have been touching this feature, rounding that, raising that." "Why, but these are all trifles, mere touches!" "Yes," said the artist, "but these make perfection and perfection is no trifle." It is an old story but a spiritual lesson which is very far from wornout. God keeps us sometimes years learning a few touches of heavenliness, which constitutes the difference between the image of Christ and the blundered and broken image of an imperfect man.

V. THE RELATION OF GROWTH TO OUR SECURITY AND STEADFASTNESS IN CHRISTIAN LIFE.

It is not a matter of personal preference whether we shall grow or not. It is a matter of vital necessity, for only thus can we be kept from retrograding. This the apostle hints in our text, "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Growth is the remedy for declension and we must ever grow or go backward. So in 1 Peter ii: the same truth is expounded. "If ye do these things ye shall never fall. He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." That is the very experience of conversion-it fades away and becomes but a dim recollection unless we press on to deeper and higher things.

Alas! have we not all sometimes seen men truly and wonderfully converted and much used of God for the conversion even of others, and yet men who refused to go on to higher experiences, and sometimes even have scouted the doctrine and experience of sanctification as an affectation or fanaticism. Alas! the day came when even their experience of conversion faded, at least for a time, and they were plunged in some deep and bitter fall to compel them to see the need of something higher. It is not possible for us to remain with safety in any stereotyped experience. Indeed, it is necessary for us to grow with an accelerated motion and to make more rapid progress the longer we continue in the Christian life.

And so we have a very strong figure even in this passage expressing this thought. The word translated "abound" in our version, in the Greek is "multiply." "If these things be in you and multiply, they shall make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus." Let us not fail to notice the striking antithesis of the "add" in verse 3, and the "multiply" of verse 8. We all know in arithmetic the difference between addition and multiplication. The addition of nine to nine makes eighteen, but the multiplication of nine into nine reverses the figures and makes eighty-one, or nearly five times as much. Everything depends upon the size of the multiplier. In the spiritual arithmetic the multiplier is God and infinitely higher than the highest digits of human calculation. God simply takes the surrendered heart and unites Himself with it, and the result is as many times greater than itself as God is greater than man.

Beloved, shall we meet God's expectation and provision and press on from grace to grace and from grace to glory?

VI. THE RELATION OF GROWTH TO REWARD.

The apostle carries on the thought to the sublime consummation when the struggles and trials of time shall all have passed and we shall be entering the eternal port and coming into the eternal issues of our present lives. Then no struggle will be regarded as too severe, no self-denial will be regretted, no toilsome patient victory will be remembered as too trying, but these very things will constitute the exquisite joy and recompense of our eternal homecoming. "For so," he says, "an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." How it lights up this whole passage with a wondrous glory to remember that the Greek word used here to describe our entrance into the kingdom is the very same Greek word used with respect to the "adding" to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, and all the train of heavenly graces. It is the beautiful metaphor of the "choregos." It is not that an abundant entrance merely shall be ministered unto us, but the idea is that a whole chorus of heavenly voices and harmonies will sing us home, and that we shall enter like warriors returning in triumphal procession from a hard won and glorious victory. It is not merely that a chorus will meet us, but it is the very same choir that we ourselves gathered around us in our earthly conflict. The graces, the virtues, the victories, the triumphs of patience and love that we won and perhaps had quite forgotten will all be waiting yonder like troops of angels, and all shall gather round us and fit into the chorus of joy that shall celebrate our homecoming.

Sometimes God has given us a little taste on earth of this ecstatic joy, when some ministry of love that we had long ago forgotten comes back to our recollection through the friend whom we had been the means of saving, or some word or deed is recalled by the testimony of one to whom we were made a blessing through an act of self-denial or faithfulness; and we find, a quarter of a century afterwards, that the little service has been travelling round the world and blessing hundreds on the way. We are melted into grateful wonder and adoring praise.

But these are but approximations of what it will be then, when all that we have been permitted to suffer and do for Jesus will be found awaiting us on the threshold of glory, and shall usher us in triumphal procession into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Oh, how we shall rejoice that we were permitted once to suffer and sacrifice for Jesus! Oh, how some will wish that they might have once more the opportunity of winning such a welcome and gaining such a great reward. Beloved, nothing that we gain for God can ever be lost. Oh, may the Master help us, "giving all diligence," to make the most of life and all its opportunities and resources of grace and lay up for ourselves treasures on high which shall never fade away.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ab-simpson/spiritual-growth/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

