

Spiritual Growth 3. Its Necessity

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

Spiritual Growth

3. Its Necessity

I

We commenced the last chapter by pointing out that none can possibly make any progress in the Christian life unless he first be a Christian and then devoted the remainder to defining and describing what a "Christian" is. It is indeed striking to note that this title is used by the Holy Spirit in a two fold way: primarily it signifies an "anointed one"; subordinately it denotes "a disciple of Christ." Thereby they have brought together in a truly wonderful manner both the Divine and the human sides. Our "anointing" with the Spirit is God's act, wherein we are entirely passive; but our becoming "disciples of Christ" is a voluntary and conscious act of ours, whereby we freely surrender to Christ's lordship and submit to His sceptre. It is by the latter that we obtain evidence of the former. None will yield to the flesh-repellent terms of Christian "discipleship" save those in whom a Divine work of grace has been wrought, but when that miracle has occurred conversion is as certain to follow as a cause will produce its effects. One made a new creature by the Divine miracle of the new birth desires and gladly endeavors to meet the holy requirements of Christ. Here, then, is the root of spiritual growth the communication to the soul of spiritual life. Here is what makes possible Christian progress: a person's becoming a Christian, first by the Spirit's anointing and then by his own choice. This twofold signification of the term "Christian" is the principal key which opens to us the subject of Christian progress or spiritual growth, for it ever needs to be contemplated from both the Divine and human sides. It requires to be viewed both from the angle of God's operations and from that of the discharge of our responsibilities. The twofold meaning of the title "Christian" must also be borne in mind under the present aspect of our subject, for on the one hand progress is neither necessary nor possible, while in another very real sense it is both desirable and requisite. God's "anointing" is not susceptible of improvement, being perfect; but our "discipleship" is to become more intelligent and productive of good works. Much confusion has resulted from ignoring this distinction, and we shall devote the remainder of this chapter to the negative side, pointing out those respects in which progress or growth does not obtain. 1. Christian progress does not signify advancing in God's favor. The believer's growth in grace does not further him one iota in God's esteem. How could it, since God is the Giver of his faith and the One who has "wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12)! God's favorable regard of His people originated not in anything whatever in them, either actual or foreseen. God's grace is absolutely free, being the spontaneous exercise of His own mere good pleasure. The cause of its exercise lies wholly

within Himself. The purposing grace of God is that good will which He had unto His people from all eternity: "Who bath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). And the dispensing grace of God is but the execution of His purpose, ministering to His people: thus we read "God giveth more grace," yea, that "he giveth more grace" (James 4:6). It is entirely gratuitous, sovereignly bestowed, without any inducement being found in its object. Furthermore, everything God does for and bestows on His people is for Christ's sake. It is in no wise a question of their deserts, but of Christ's deserts or what he merited for them. As Christ is the only Way by which we can approach the Father, so He is the sole channel through which God's grace flows unto us. Hence we read of the "grace of God, and the gift of grace (namely, justifying righteousness) by one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15); and again, "the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4). The love of God toward us is in "Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). he forgives us "for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32). He supplies all our need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). He brings us to heaven in answer to Christ's prayer (John 17:24). Yet though Christ merits everything for us, the original cause was the sovereign grace of God. "Although the merits of Christ are the (procuring) cause of our salvation, yet they are not the cause of our being ordained to salvation, They are the cause of purchasing all things decreed unto us, but they are not the cause which first moved God to decree these things unto us." (Thos. Goodwin) The Christian is not accepted because of his graces, for the very graces (as their name connotes) are bestowed upon him by Divine bounty, and are not attained by any efforts of his. And so far from these graces being the reason why God accepts him, they are the fruits of his being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" and, decretively, "blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3, 4). Settle it then in your own mind once for all, my reader, that growth in grace does not signify growing in the favor of God. This is essentially a Papish delusion, and though creature-flattering it is a horribly Christ—dishonoring one. Since God's elect are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6), it is impossible that any subsequent change wrought in or attained by them could render them more excellent in His esteem or advance them in His love. When the Father announced concerning the incarnate Word "This is my beloved Son [not "with whom" but] in whom I am well pleased" He was expressing His delight in the whole election of grace, for He was speaking of Christ in His federal character, as the last Adam, as head of His mystical body. The Christian can neither increase nor decrease in the favor of God, nor can anything he does or fails to do alter or affect to the slightest degree his perfect standing in Christ. Yet let it not be inferred from this that his conduct is of little importance or that God's dealings with him have no relation to his daily walk. While avoiding the Romish conceit of human merits, we must be on our guard against Antinomian licentiousness. As the moral Governor of this world God takes note of our conduct, and in a variety of ways makes manifest His approbation or disapprobation: "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11), yet to His own people God says "your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jer. 5:25). So, too, as the Father He maintains discipline in His family, and when His children are refractory He uses the rod (Ps. 89:3-33). Special manifestations of Divine love are granted to the obedient (John 14:21, 23), but are withheld from the disobedient and the careless. 2. Christian progress does not denote that the work of regeneration was incomplete. Great care needs to be taken in stating this truth of spiritual growth lest we repudiate the perfection of the new birth. We must repeat here in substance what was pointed out in the first article. When a normal child is born into this world naturally the babe is an entire entity, complete in all its parts, possessing a full set of bodily members and mental faculties. As the child grows there is a strengthening of its body and mind, a development of its members and an expansion of its faculties, with a fuller use of the one and a clearer manifestation of the other; yet no new member or additional faculty is or can be added to him. It is

precisely so spiritually. The spiritual life or nature received at the new birth contains within itself all the "senses" (Heb. 5:14) and graces, and though these may be nourished and strengthened, and increased by exercise yet not by addition, no, not in heaven itself. "I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). The "babe" in Christ is just as truly and completely a child of God as the most matured "father" in Christ. Regeneration is a more radical and revolutionizing change than glorification. The one is a passing from death unto life, the other an entrance into the fulness of life. The one is a bringing into existence of "the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22), the other is a reaching unto the full stature of the new man. The one is a translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13), the other an induction into the higher privileges of that kingdom. The one is the begetting of us unto a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), the other is a realization of that hope. At regeneration the soul is made a new creature in Christ, so that "old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). The regenerate soul is a partaker of every grace of the Spirit so that he is "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10), and no growth on earth or glorification in heaven can make him more than complete.

3. Christian progress does not procure a title for heaven. The perfect and indefeasible title of every believer is in the merits of Christ. His vicarious fulfilling of the law, whereby He magnified and made it honorable, secured for all in whose stead He acted the full reward of the law. It is on the all-sufficient ground of Christ's perfect obedience being reckoned to his account that the believer is justified by God and assured that he shall "reign in life" (Rom. 5:17). If he had lived on earth another hundred years and served God perfectly it would add nothing to his title. Heaven is the "purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14), purchased for His people by the whole redemptive work of Christ. His precious blood gives every believing sinner the legal right to "enter the holiest" (Heb. 10:19). Our title to glory is found alone in Christ. Of the redeemed now in heaven it is said, they have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple" (Rev. 7:14, 15). It has not been sufficiently realized that God's pronouncement of justification is very much more than a mere sense of acquittal or non-condemnation. It includes as well the positive imputation of righteousness. As James Hervey so beautifully illustrated it: "When yonder orb makes his first appearance in the east, what effects are produced? Not only are the shades of night dispersed, but the light of day is diffused. Thus it is when the Author of salvation is manifested to the soul: he brings at once pardon and acceptance." Not only are our "filthy rags" removed, but the "best robe" is put upon us (Luke 15:22) and no efforts or attainments of ours can add anything to such a Divine adornment. Christ not only delivers us from death, but purchased life for us; He not only put away our sins but merited an inheritance for us. The most mature and advanced Christian has nought to plead before God for his acceptance than the righteousness of Christ: that, nothing but that, and nothing added to it, as his perfect title to Glory.

4. Christian progress does not make us meet for heaven. Many of those who are more or less clear on the three points considered above are far from being so upon this one, and therefore we must enter into it at greater length. Thousands have been taught to believe that when a person has been justified by God and tasted the blessedness of "the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" that much still remains to be done for the soul before it is ready for the celestial courts. A widespread impression prevails that after his justification the believer must undergo the refining process of sanctification, and that for this he must be left for a time amid the trials and conflicts of a hostile world; yea so strongly held is this view that some are likely to take exception to what follows. Nevertheless, such a theory repudiates the fact that it is the new-creative work of the Spirit which not only capacitates the soul to take in and enjoy spiritual things now (John 3:3, 5), but also fits it experimentally for the eternal fruition of God. One had thought that those laboring under the mistake mentioned above would be corrected by their own experience and by what they observed in their fellow Christians. They frankly

acknowledge that their own progress is most unsatisfactory to them, and they have no means of knowing when the process is to be successfully completed. They see their fellow Christians cut off apparently in very varied stages of this process. If it be said that this process is completed only at death, then we would point out that even on their death-beds the most eminent and mature saints have testified to being most humiliated over their attainments and thoroughly dissatisfied with themselves. Their final triumph was not what grace had made them to be in themselves, but what Christ was made to be unto them. If such a view as the above were true, how could any believer cherish a desire to depart and be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) while the very fact that he was still in the body would be proof (according to this idea) that the process was not yet complete to fit him for His presence! But, it may be asked, is there not such a thing as "progressive sanctification"? We answer, it all depends on what is signified by that expression. In our judgment it is one which needs to be carefully and precisely defined, otherwise God is likely to be grossly dishonored and His people seriously injured by being brought into bondage by a most inadequate and defective view of Sanctification as a whole. There are several essential and fundamental respects in which sanctification is not "progressive," wherein it admits of no degrees and is incapable of augmentation, and those aspects of sanctification need to be plainly stated and clearly apprehended before the subordinate aspect is considered. First, every believer was decretively sanctified by God the Father before the foundation of the world (Jude 1). Second, he was meritoriously sanctified by God the Son in the redemptive work which He performed in the stead of and on the behalf of His people, so that it is written "by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Third, he was vitally sanctified by God the Spirit when He quickened him into newness of life, united him to Christ, and made his body His temple. If by "progressive sanctification" be meant a clearer understanding and fuller apprehension of what God has made Christ to be unto the believer and of his perfect standing and state in Him; if by it be meant the believer living more and more in the enjoyment and power of that, with the corresponding influence and effect it will have upon his character and conduct; if by it be meant a growth of faith and an increase of its fruits, manifested in a holy walk, then we have no objection to the term. But if by "progressive sanctification" be intended a rendering of the believer more acceptable unto God, or a making of him more fit for the heavenly Jerusalem, then we have no hesitation in rejecting it as a serious error. Not only can there be no increase in the purity and acceptableness of the believer's sanctity before God, but there can be no addition to that holiness of which he became the possessor at the new birth, for the new nature he then received is essentially and impeccably holy. "The babe in Christ, dying as such, is as capable of as high communion with God as Paul in the state of glory." (S. E. Pierce) Instead of striving after and praying that God would make us more fit for heaven, how much better to join with the apostle in "giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), and then seek to walk suitably unto such a privilege and dignity! That is for the saints to "possess their possessions" (Obad. 17); the other is to be robbed of them by a thinly-disguised Romanism. Before pointing out in what the Christian's meetness for heaven consists, let us note that heaven is here termed all inheritance." Now an inheritance is not something that we acquire by self-denial and mortification, nor purchased by our own labors or good works; rather it is that to which we lawfully succeed in virtue of our relationship to another. Primarily, it is that to which a child succeeds in virtue to his relationship to his father, or as the son of a king inherits the crown. In this case, the inheritance is ours in virtue of our being sons of God. Peter declares that the Father hath "begotten us unto a living hope . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4). Paul also speaks of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God, and then points out: "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16, 17). If we inquire more distinctly, what is this "inheritance" of the children of God? the next verse (Col. 1:13) tells us: it is the kingdom of God's dear

Son." Those who are joint-heirs with Christ must share His kingdom. Already He has made us "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:5), and the inheritance of kings is a crown, a throne, a kingdom. The blessedness which lies before the redeemed is not merely to be subjects of the King of kings, but to sit with Him on His throne, to reign with Him forever (Rom. 5:17; Rev. 22:4). Such is the wondrous dignity of our inheritance: as to its extent, we are "joint-heirs with" Him whom God "hath appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). Our destiny is bound up with His. O that the faith of Christians would rise above their "feelings," "conflicts," and "experiences," and possess their possessions. The Christian's title to the inheritance is the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; in what, then, consists his "meetness"? First, since it be meetness for the inheritance, they must be children of God, and this they are made at the moment of regeneration. Second, since it is the inheritance of saints," they must be saints, and this too they are the moment they believe in Christ, for they are then sanctified by that very blood in which they have forgiveness of sins (Heb. 13:12). Third, since it is an inheritance "in light," they must be made children of light, and this also they become when God called them "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Nor is that characteristic only of certain specially favored saints; "ye are all the children of light." (1 Thess. 5:5) Fourth, since the inheritance consists of an everlasting kingdom, in order to enjoy it we must have eternal life; and that too every Christian possesses: "he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28). Are they children in name but not in nature? What a question! It might as well be supposed they have a title to an inheritance and yet be without meetness for it, which would be saying that our sonship was a fiction and not a reality. Very different is the teaching of God's Word: it declares that we become His children by being born again (John 1:13). And regeneration does not consist in the gradual improvement or purification of the old nature, but the creation of a new one. Nor is becoming children of God a lengthy process at all, but an instantaneous thing. The all-mighty agent of it is the Holy Spirit, and obviously that which is born of Him needs no improving or perfecting. The "new man" is itself "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22) and certainly it cannot stand in need of a "progressive" work to be wrought in him! True, the old nature opposes all the aspirations and activities of this new nature, and therefore as long as the believer remains in the flesh he is called upon "through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body," yet in spite of the painful and weary conflict, the new nature remains uncontaminated by the vileness in the midst of which he dwells. That which qualifies the Christian or makes him meet for heaven is the spiritual life which he received at regeneration, for that is the life or nature of God (John 3:5; 2 Peter 1:4). That new life or nature fits the Christian for communion with God, for the presence of God—the same day the dying thief received it, he was with Christ in Paradise! It is true that while we are left here its manifestation is obscured, like the sunbeam shining through opaque glass. Yet the sunbeam itself is not dim, though it appears so because of the unsuitable medium through which it passes; but let that opaque glass be removed and it will at once appear in its beauty. So it is with the spiritual life of the Christian: there is no defeat whatever in the life itself but its manifestation is sadly obscured by a mortal body; all that is necessary for the appearing of its perfections is deliverance from the corrupt medium through which it now acts. The life of God in the soul renders a person meet for glory: no attainment of ours, no growth in grace we experience, can fit us for heaven any more than it can entitle us to it. II

If the regeneration of Christians be complete, if their effectual sanctification be effected, if they are already fitted for heaven, then why does God still leave them here on earth? Why not take them to His own immediate presence as soon as they be born again? Our first answer is, There is no "if" about it. Scripture distinctly and expressly affirms that even now believers are "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10), that He has "perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), that they are "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), and more than "complete," "perfect" and "meet" none will ever be. As to why

God—generally, though not always—leaves the babe in Christ in this world for a longer or shorter period: even if no satisfactory reason could be suggested, that would not invalidate to the slightest degree what has been demonstrated, for when any truth is clearly established a hundred objections cannot set it aside. However, while we do not pretend to fathom the mind of God, the following consequences are more or less obvious. By leaving His people here for a season opportunity is given for: 1. God to manifest His keeping power: not only in a hostile world, but sin still indwelling believers. 2. To demonstrate the sufficiency of His grace: supporting them in their weakness. 3. To maintain a witness for Himself in a scene which lieth in the Wicked One. 4. To exhibit His faithfulness in supplying all their need in the wilderness before they reach Canaan. 5. To display His manifold wisdom unto angels (1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10). 6. To act as "salt" in preserving the race from moral suicide: by the purifying and restraining influence they exert. 7. To make evident the reality of their faith: trusting Him in sharpest trials and darkest dispensations. 8. To give them an occasion to glorify Him in the place where they dishonored Him. 9. To preach the gospel to those of His elect yet in unbelief. 10. To afford proof that they will serve Him amid the most disadvantageous circumstances. 11. To deepen their appreciation of what He has prepared for them. 12. To have fellowship with Christ who endured the cross before He was crowned with glory and honor. Before showing why Christian progress is necessary let us remind the reader once more of the double signification of the term "Christian," namely, "an anointed one" and "a disciple of Christ," and how this supplies the principal key to the subject before us, intimating its twofoldness. His "anointing" with the Spirit of God is an act of God wherein he is entirely passive, but his becoming a "disciple of Christ" is a voluntary act of his own, wherein he surrenders to Christ's Lordship and resolves to be ruled by His sceptre. Only as this is duly borne in mind shall we be preserved from error on either side as we pass from one aspect of our theme to another. As the double meaning of the name "Christian" points to both the Divine operations and human activity, so in the Christian's progress we must keep before us the exercise of God's sovereignty and the discharge of our responsibility. Thus from one angle growth is neither necessary nor possible; from another it is both desirable and requisite. It is from this second angle we are now going to view the Christian, setting forth his obligations therein. Let us illustrate what has been said above on the twofoldness of this truth by a few simple comments on a well-known verse: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). First, this implies that in our fallen condition we are wayward at heart, prone to follow a course of folly; and such is our present state by nature. Second, it implies that the Lord's people have had a discovery made to them of their woeful case, and are conscious of their sinful inability to correct the same; which is the experience of all the regenerate. Third, it signifies an owning of this humiliating truth, a crying to God for enablement. They beg to be "so taught," as to be actually empowered. In other words, it is a prayer for enabling grace. Fourth, it expresses the end in view: "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"—perform our duty, discharge our obligations, conduct ourselves as "Wisdom's children." Grace is to be improved, turned to good account, traded with. We all know what is meant by a person's "applying his mind" to his studies, namely, that he gathers his wandering thoughts, focuses his attention on the subject before him, concentrates thereon. Equally evident is a person's "applying his hand" to a piece of manual labor, namely, that he get down to business, set himself to the work before him, earnestly endeavor to make a good job of it. In either case there is an implication: in the former, that he has been given a sound mind, in the latter that he possesses a healthy body. And in connection with both cases it is universally acknowledged that the one ought to so employ his mind and the other his bodily strength. Equally obvious should be the meaning of and the obligation to "apply our hearts unto wisdom": that is, diligently, fervently, earnestly make wisdom our quest and walk in her ways. Since God has given a "new heart" at regeneration, it is to be thus employed. If He has quickened us into newness of life then we ought to grow in grace. If He has made us new creatures in

Christ we are to progress as Christians. Because this will be read by such widely-different classes of readers and we are anxious to help all, we must consider here an objection, for the removal of which we quote the renowned John Owen. "It will be said that if not only the beginning of grace, sanctification, and holiness from God, but the carrying of it on and the increase of it also be from Him, and not only so in general, but that all the actings of grace, and every act of it, be an immediate effect of the Holy Spirit, then what need is there that we should take any pains in this thing ourselves, or use our own endeavors to grow in grace and holiness as we are commanded? If God worketh all Himself in us, and without His effectual operation in us we can do nothing, there is no place left for our diligence, duty, or obedience. "Answer. 1. This objection we must expect to meet withal at every turn. Men will not believe there is a consistency between God's effectual grace and our diligent obedience; that is, they will not believe what is plainly, clearly, distinctly, revealed in the Scripture, and which is suited unto the experience of all that truly believe, because they cannot, it may be, comprehend it within the compass of carnal reason. 2. Let the apostle answer this objection for this once: 'his Divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of his that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these we might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust' (2 Peter 1:3, 4), If all things that pertain unto life and godliness, among which doubtless is the preservation and increase of grace, be given unto us by the power of God; if from Him we receive that Divine nature, by virtue whereof our corruptions are subdued, then I pray what need is there of any endeavors of our own? The whole work of sanctification is wrought in us, it seems, and that by the power of God: we, therefore, may let it alone and leave it unto Him whose it is, whilst we are negligent, secure and at ease. Nay, says the apostle, this is not the use which the grace of God is to be put unto. The consideration of it is or ought to be, the principal motive and encouragement unto all diligence for the increase of holiness in us. For so he adds immediately: 'But also for this cause' [Greek] or because of the gracious operations of the Divine power in us; 'giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,' etc. (v. 5). 'These objectors and this apostle were very diversely minded in these matters: what they make an insuperable discouragement unto diligence in obedience, that he makes the greatest motive and encouragement thereunto. 3. I say, from this consideration it will unavoidably follow, that we ought continually to wait and depend on God for supplies of His Spirit and grace without which we can do nothing; that God is more the Author by His grace of the good we do than we are ourselves (not I, but the grace of God that was with me): that we ought to be careful that by our negligences and sins we provoke not the Holy Spirit to withhold His aids and assistances, and so to leave us to ourselves, in which condition we can do nothing that is spiritually good: these things, I say, will unavoidably follow on the doctrine before declared; and if any one be offended at them it is not in our power to render them relief." Coming now more directly to the needs-be for spiritual growth or Christian progress. This is not optional but obligatory, for we are expressly bidder, to "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)—grow from infancy to the vigor of youth, and from the zeal of youth to the wisdom of maturity. And again, to be "building up yourselves on your most holy faith." (Jude 21) It is not sufficient to be grounded and established in the faith, for we must grow more and more therein. At conversion we take upon us the "yoke" of Christ, and then His word is "learn of me," which is to be a lifelong experience. In becoming Christ's disciples we do not enter His school: not remain in the kindergarten but to progress under His tuition. "A wise man will hear and increase learning" (Prov. 1:5), and seek to make good use of that learning. The believer has not yet reached heaven: he is on the way, journeying thither, fleeing from the city of destruction. That is why the Christian life is so often likened unto a race, and the believer unto a runner: "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize" (Phil. 3:13, 14). 1. Only

thus is the triune God glorified. This is so obvious that it really needs no arguing. It brings no glory to God that His children should be dwarfs. As sunshine and rain are sent for the nourishment and fructification of vegetation so the means of grace are provided that we may increase in our spiritual stature. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2) —not only in the intellectual knowledge of it, but in a practical conformity thereunto. This should be our chief concern and be made our principal business: to become better acquainted with God, to have the heart more occupied with and affected by His perfections, to seek after a fuller knowledge of His will, to regulate our conduct thereby, and thus "show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The more we evidence our sonship, the more we conduct ourselves as becometh the children of God before a perverse generation, the more do we honor Him who has set His love upon us. That our spiritual growth and progress is glorifying unto God appears plainly from the prayers of the apostles, for none were more concerned about His glory than they, and nothing occupied so prominent a place in their intercession as this. As we hope to allude to this again later, one or two quotations here must suffice. For the Ephesians Paul prayed, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (5:19). For the Philippians, "that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment . . . being filled with the fruits of righteousness" (1:9-11). For the Colossians, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:10, 11). From which we learn that it is our privilege and duty to obtain more spiritual views of the Divine perfections, begetting in us an increasing holy delight in Him, making our walk more acceptable. There should be a growing acquaintance with the excellency of Christ, advancing in our love of Him, and the more lively exercises of our graces.

2. Only thus do we give proof of our regeneration. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). That does not mean we become the disciples of Christ as a result of our fruitfulness, but that we make manifest we are His by our fruitbearing. They who bear no fruit have no vital union with Christ, and like the barren fig tree, are under His curse. Very solemn is this, and by such a criterion each of us should measure himself. That which is brought forth by the Christian is not to be restricted unto what, in many circles, is called "service" or "personal work," but has reference to that which issues from the exercise of all the spiritual graces. Thus: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44, 45), that is, that you may make it evident to yourself and fellows that you have been made "partaker of the Divine nature." "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these," etc., "but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:19, 22, 23). The reference is not directly to what the Holy Spirit produces, but rather to that which is born of the "spirit" or new nature of which He is the Author (John 5:6). This is evident from its being set over against the "works of the flesh" or old nature. It is by means of this "fruit," these lovely graces, that the regenerate make manifest the presence of a supernatural principle within them. The more such "fruit" abounds, the clearer our evidence that we have been born again. The total absence of such fruit would prove our profession to be an empty one. It has often been pointed out by others that what issues from the flesh is designated works," for a machine can produce such; but that which the "spirit" yields is living "fruit" in contrast from "dead works" (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). This fruit-bearing is necessary in order to evidence the new birth.

3. Only thus do we certify that we have been made partakers of an effectual call and are among the chosen of God. "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10) is the Divine exhortation—one which has puzzled many. Yet it should not: it is not to secure it Godward (which is impossible), but to make it more certain to yourselves and your brethren. And how is this to be accomplished? Why, by acquiring a clearer and fuller evidence of the same: by spiritual growth, for growth

is proof that life is present. This interpretation is definitely established by the context. After enumerating the bestowments of Divine grace (vv. 3, 4) the apostle says, now here is your responsibility: "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith [by bringing it into exercise] virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love" (vv. 5-7). Faith itself is ever to be operative, but according to different occasions and in their seasons let each of your graces be exercised, and in proportion as they are, the life of holiness is furthered in the soul and there is a proportionate spiritual growth (cf. Col. 3:12, 13). 4. Only thus do we adorn the doctrine we profess (Titus 2:10). The Truth we claim to have received into our hearts is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3), and therefore the more our daily lives be conformed thereto the clearer proof do we give that our character and conduct is regulated by heavenly principles. It is by our fruits we are known (Matthew 7:16), for "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." Thus, it is only by our being "fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10) that we make it manifest that we are the "trees of the Lord" (Ps. 104:16). "Now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). It is not the character of our walk which qualifies us to become the children of light, but which demonstrates that we are such. Because we are children of Him who is light (1 John 1:5) we must shun the darkness. If we have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2) then only that should proceed from us which "becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). The more we progress in godliness the more we adorn our profession. 5. Only thus do we experience more genuine assurance. Peace becomes more stable and joy abounds in proportion as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and become more conformed practically to His holy image. It is because so many become slack in using the means of grace and are so little exercised about growing up into Christ "in all things" (Eph. 4:16) that doubts and fears possess their hearts. If they do not "give all diligence to add to their faith" (2 Peter 1:5) by cultivating their several graces, they must not be surprised if they are far from being "sure" of their Divine calling and election. It is "the diligent soul," and not the dilatory, who "shall be made fat" (Prov. 13:4). It is the one who makes conscience of obedience and keeps Christ's commandments who is favored with love-tokens from Him (John 14:21). There is an inseparable connection between our being "led [forward] by the Spirit of God"—which intimates our voluntary occurrence—and His "bearing witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:14, 16). 6. Only thus are we preserved from grievous backsliding. In view of much that has been said above this should be quite obvious. The very term "backsliding" denotes failure to make progress and go forward. Peter's denial of Christ in the high priest's palace was preceded by his following Him "afar off" (Matthew 26:58), and that has been recorded for our learning and warning. The same principle is illustrated again in connection with the awful fall of David. Though it was "at the time when kings go forth to battle" he was selfishly and lazily taking his ease, and while so lax succumbed to temptation (1 Sam. 11:1, 2). Unless we "follow on to know the Lord" and learn to make use of the armor which He has provided, we shall easily be overcome by the Enemy. Only as our hearts are kept healthy and our affection set upon things above shall we be impervious to the attractions of this world. We cannot be stationary: if we do not grow, we shall decline. 7. Only thus shall we preserve the cause of Christ from reproach. The backsliding of His people makes His enemies to blaspheme—how many have taken occasion to do so from the sad case of David! When the world sees us halting, it is gratified, being bolstered up in their idea that godliness is but a pose, a sham. Because of this, among other reasons, Christians are bidden to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom shine ye as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). If we go backward instead of forward—and we must do one or the other—then we greatly dishonor the name of Christ and fill His foes with unholy glee. Rather is it "the will of God that with well-doing we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). The longer they remain in this world, the more

apparent should be the contrast between the children of light and those who are the subjects of the Prince of darkness. Very necessary then, from many considerations, is our growth in grace.

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