

Spiritual Growth 4. Its Nature

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Transcript

Spiritual Growth

4. Its Nature

I

We have now arrived at what is really the most important part of our subject, but which is far from being the easiest to handle. If we are to be preserved or delivered from erroneous views at this point it is very necessary that we should form a right concept of what spiritual growth is not and what it actually is. Mistaken ideas thereon are widely prevalent and many of God's own people have been brought into bondage thereby. There are those who have made little or no advancement in the school of Christ that fondly imagine they have progressed considerably, and are very hurt if others do not share their opinion; nor is it any simple task to disillusion them. On the other hand, some who have grown considerably know it not, and even conclude they have gone backward; nor is it any easy matter to assure them they have been, needlessly disparaging themselves. In either case the mistake is due to measuring themselves by the wrong standard, or in other words, through ignorance of what spiritual growth really consists. If the reader met a half dozen people out of as many different sections of Christendom whom he is warranted in regarding as children of God, and asked them to define for him their ideas of spiritual growth, he would probably be surprised at the diversity and contrariety of the answers given. As the reception of one part of the Truth prepares us to take in another, so the admittance of error paves the way for the coming in of more. Moreover, the particular denomination to which we belong and the distinctive form of its "line of things" (2 Cor. 10:16), has a powerful effect in determining the type of Christians reared under its influences—just as the nature of the soil affects the plants growing in it. Not only are his theological views cast into a certain mold and his concept of the practical side of Christianity largely determined thereby, but his devotional life and even his personal demeanor are also considerably affected by the same. Consequently there is much similarity in the "experience" of the great majority belonging to that particular party. This is largely the case with all the principal evangelical denominations, as it is also with those who profess to be "outside all systems." Just as a trained ear can readily detect variations of inflection in the human voice and locate by a person's speech and accent which part of the country he hails from, so one with wide interdenominational associations has little difficulty in determining, even from a brief talk on spiritual things, which sect his companion belongs to: no label is necessary, his affiliation is plainly stamped upon him. And if in the course of the conversation he should ask his acquaintance to describe what he considered to be a mature Christian, his portrayal would naturally and necessarily be shaped by

the particular ecclesiastical type he was best acquainted with. If he belonged to one particular group, he would picture a somber and gloomy Christian; but if to a group at the opposite pole, a confident and joyous one. The kind most admired in some circles is a deep theologian; in others, the one who decries "dry doctrine" and is occupied chiefly with his subjective life. Yet another would value neither theology nor experience, considering that the soul's contemplation of Christ was the beginning and end of the Christian life; while still others would regard as eminent Christians those who were most zealous and active in seeking to save sinners. In attempting to describe the character of Christian progress, or as it is more frequently termed, growth in grace, we shall therefore seek to avoid a mistake often made thereon by many denominational writers—a mistake which has had most injurious effects on a large number of their readers. Instead of bringing out what the Scriptures teach thereon, only too often they related their own experiences; instead of treating the essentials of spiritual growth, they dwelt upon circumstantialities; instead of delineating those general features which are common to all who are the subjects of gracious operations, they depicted those exceptional things which are peculiar only to certain types—the neurotic or melancholy. This is much the same as though artists and sculptors took for their models only those with unusual deformities, instead of selecting an average specimen of humanity. True, it would be a human being that was imaged, yet it could convey only a misrepresentation of the common species. Alas that, in the religious as well as the physical realm, a freak attracts more attention than a normal person. We shall not then relate our own spiritual history. First, because we are not now writing to satisfy the unhealthy curiosity of a certain class of readers who delight in perusing such things. Second, because we regard the private experience of the Christian as being too sacred to expose to the public view. It has long seemed to us that there is such a thing as spiritual unchastity: the inner workings of the soul are not a fit subject to be laid bare before others—"The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" (Prov. 14:10). Third, because we are not so conceited as to imagine our own particular conversion and the ups and downs of our Christian life are of sufficient importance to narrate. Fourth, because there are probably some features about our conversion and some things in our subsequent spiritual history which have been duplicated in very few other cases, and therefore they would only be calculated to mislead others if they should look for a parallel in themselves. Finally, because as intimated above, we deem it more honoring to God and far more helpful to souls to confine ourselves to the teaching of His Word on this subject. But before proceeding we must anticipate an objection which is almost certain to be brought against what has been said in the last paragraph. Did not the apostle Paul describe his conversion. And may not, should not, we do so too? Answer: first, Paul is the only New Testament writer who gave us any account of his conversion or related anything of his subsequent experiences. It would be a reversal of all sound reasoning to make an exception into a rule or conclude that an isolated case established a precedent. The very fact that Paul's case stands alone, indicates it is not to be made an example of. Second, his experience was not only exceptional but unique: the means used was the supernatural appearance to him of the ascended Christ, so that he had a physical sight of Him and heard His voice with his natural ears—a thing which none has done since. Third, the account of his conversion was not made to intimate Christian friends, nor before a local church when applying for membership, but instead before his enemies (Acts 22), and Agrippa—virtually his judge—when making a defense for his life. Thus the circumstances were extraordinary and afford no criterion for ordinary cases. Finally, his experience on the Damascus road was necessary to qualify him for the apostolic office (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:8, 9; cf. 2 Cor. 12:11). Once more it seems advisable to take up first the negative side of our subject ere turning to the positive. So many mistaken notions now hold the field that they need uprooting if the ground is to be prepared: or to drop the figure, if the minds of many are to be fitted to take in the Truth. Our readers differ so much in the type of ministry they have sat under, and some of them have formed

such fallacious views of what spiritual growth consists of, that if we now described the principal elements of Christian progress, one and another would probably consider, according to what they have imbibed, that we had omitted the most important features. We shall therefore devote the remainder of this chapter to pointing out as many as possible of those things which, though often regarded as such, are not essential parts of spiritual growth, in fact no part thereof at all. Though this may prove rather wearisome to some, we would ask them to bear with us and offer up a prayer that it may please God to use the paragraphs which follow to the enlightenment of those who are befogged.

1. Weight of years. It is often considered that spiritual growth is to be measured by the calendar, that the length of time one has been a Christian will determine the amount of progress he has made. Certainly it ought to be so, yet in fact it is frequently no index at all. God often pours contempt on the distinctions made by men: out of the mouth of "babes and sucklings" has He perfected praise (Matthew 21:16). It is generally supposed that those with snowy locks are much more spiritual than young believers, yet if we examine what is recorded of the closing years of Abraham, Isaac, David, Hezekiah and others of Israel's kings, we find reason to revise or qualify such a conclusion. True, some of the choicest saints we have ever met were "patriarchs" and "mothers in Israel," yet they have been exceptions rather than the rule. Many Christians make more real progress in piety the first year than in the next ten that follow.
2. Increasing knowledge. We must distinguish between things that differ, namely, a knowledge of spiritual things and actual spiritual knowledge. The former can be acquired by the unregenerate: the latter is peculiar to the children of God. The one is merely intellectual and theoretical; the other is vital and effectual. One may take up "Bible study" in the same way as another would the study of philosophy or political economy. He may pursue it diligently and enthusiastically. He may obtain a familiarity of the letter of Scripture and a proficiency in understanding its terms, far in advance of the hard-working Christian who has less leisure and less natural ability; yet what is such knowledge worth if it affects not the heart, fails to transform the character and make the daily walk pleasing to God! "Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Unless our "Bible study" is conforming us, both inwardly and outwardly, to the image of Christ, it profits us not.
3. Development of gifts. An unregenerate person taking up the study of the Bible may also be one who is endowed with considerable natural talents, such as the power of concentration, a retentive memory, a persevering spirit. As he prosecutes his study his talents are called into play, his wits are sharpened and he becomes able to converse fluently upon the things he has read, and he is likely to be sought after as a speaker and preacher: and yet there may not be a spark of Divine life in his soul. The Corinthians grew fast in gifts (1 Cor. 1:4, 7) yet they were but "babes" and "carnal" (3:2, 3), and needed to be reminded of the "more excellent way" of love to God and their brethren. Ah, my reader, you may not have the showy gifts of some, nor be able to pray in public as others, but if you have a tender conscience, an honest heart, a forbearing and forgiving spirit, you have that which is far better.
4. More time spent in prayer. Here again, to avoid misunderstanding, we must distinguish between things that differ: natural prayer and spiritual. Some are constitutionally devotional and are attracted by religious exercises, as others are by music and painting; and yet they may be total strangers to the breathings of God's Spirit in their souls. They may set aside certain parts of the day for "a quiet time with God" and have a prayer list as long as their arm, and yet be utterly devoid of the spirit of grace and supplications. The Pharisees were renowned for their "long prayers." The Mohammedan with his "praying mat," the Buddhist with his "praying wheel," and the Papist with his "beads," all illustrate the same principle. It is quite true that growth in grace is ever accompanied by an increased dependence upon God and a delighting of the soul in Him, yet that does not mean that we can measure our spirituality by the clock—by the amount of time we spend on our knees.
5. Activity in service. In not a few circles this has been and still is made the test of one's spirituality. As soon as a young person makes a Christian

profession he is set to work. It matters not how ill qualified he is, lacking as yet (in many instances) even a rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of the faith, nevertheless he is required or at least expected to engage forthwith in some form of what is plausibly termed "service for Christ." But the Epistles will be searched in vain for a warrant for such things: they contain not so much as a single injunction for young believers to engage in "personal work." On the contrary they are enjoined to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1) and the young women are to be "keepers at home" (Titus 2:5). Many have reason to lament "they [not God!] made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard [spiritual graces] have I not kept" (Song of Sol. 1:6).

6. Happy feelings. Considerable allowance needs to be made for both temperament and health. Some are naturally more vivacious and emotional than others, of a more lively and cheerful spirit, and consequently they engage in singing rather than sighing, laughter than weeping. When such people are converted they are apt to be more demonstrative than others, both in expressing gratitude to the Lord and in telling people what a precious Saviour is theirs. Yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that they had received a larger measure of the Spirit than their more sober and equable brethren and sisters. A shallow brook babbles noisily but "still waters run deep"—yet there are exceptions here as the Niagara Falls illustrate. Increasing holiness is not to be gauged by our inward comforts and joy, but rather by the more substantial qualities of faith, obedience, humility and love. When a fire is first kindled there is more smoke and crackling, but after, though the flame has a narrower compass, it has more heat.

7. Becoming more miserable. Yet, strange as it may sound to some of our readers, there are not a few professing Christians who regard that as one of the principal elements of spiritual growth. They have been taught to regard assurance as presumption and Christian joy as lightness, if not levity. Should they experience a brief season of peace "in believing" they are fearful that the Devil is deceiving them. They are occupied mostly with indwelling sin rather than with Christ. They hug their fears and idolize their doubts. They consider that the slough of despond is the only place of safety, and are happiest when most wretched. This is by no means an exaggerated picture, but sadly true to a certain type of religious life, where long-facedness and speaking in whispers are regarded as evidence of a "deep experience" and marks of piety. True, the more light God gives us the more we perceive our sinfulness, though humbled thereby, the more thankful we should be for the cleansing blood.

8. Added usefulness. But God is sovereign and orders His providences accordingly. Unto one He opens doors, unto another He closes them, and to His good pleasure we are called upon to submit. Some streams He replenishes, but others are suffered to dry up: thus it is in His dealings with His people—by providing or withholding favorable openings for them to be of spiritual help to their fellows. It is therefore a great mistake to measure our growth in grace and our bringing forth of good fruit by the largeness or smallness of our opportunities of doing good. Some have larger opportunities when young than when they become older, yet if the hearts of the latter are right, God accepts the will for the deed. Some that have the most grace are stationed in isolated places and are largely unknown to their fellow Christians, yet the eye of God sees them. Shall we say that the flowers on the mountain side are wasted because no human eye admires them, or that the songs of birds in the forests are lost on the air because they regale not the ears of men!

9. Temporal prosperity. Though it is shared by few of our fellow ministers, yet it is the firm conviction of this writer that, as a general rule, temporal adversity and straitened circumstances in the present life of a Christian is a mark of God's displeasure, an evidence that he has choked the channel of blessing (see Ps. 84:11; Jer. 5:25; Matthew 6:33). On the other hand we should certainly be drawing an erroneous conclusion if we regard the flourishing affairs of an unregenerate professor as a proof that the smile of heaven rested upon him, rather would it be the ease of one who was being fattened for the "day of slaughter" (James 5:5). Many such an one receives his good things in this world, but in the world to come is tormented in the flame (Luke 16:24, 25). Even among God's own people there may be those who yield to a spirit of

covetousness, and in some cases the Lord gratifies their carnal desires, but "sends leanness into their souls" as He did with Israel of old. 10. Liberality in giving. We do not believe any heart can remain selfish and miserly where the love of God has been shed abroad in it, but rather that such an one will esteem it a privilege as well as duty to support the cause of Christ and minister to any brother in need, according as God has prospered him, yet it is a very misleading standard to judge a person's spirituality by his generosity (1 Cor. 13:3). For some years we lived in districts where the principal denominations taught that the church's spirituality was measured by the amount it contributed to missions; yet while numbers of them raised very considerable sums, vital godliness was most conspicuous by its absence. Millions of dollars are given to the "Red Cross Society" by those making no Christian profession at all! Never were the coffers of the churches so full as they are today, and never were the churches so devoid of the Spirit's unction and blessing. II

All sound teaching, like the safest method of reasoning, proceeds from the general to the particular, and therefore we shall attempt to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, before we enter into a detailed analysis of the same. God first gave Israel His law, and then because His "commandment is exceeding broad" (Ps. 119:96) supplied amplification through the prophets and a still more specific explication of its contents through Christ and His apostles. Spiritual growth is the development of spiritual life, and spiritual life is communicated to a sinner at the new birth, so the more clearly we are enabled to understand the nature of regeneration, the better prepared we shall be to perceive the character of spiritual growth. Admittedly regeneration is profoundly mysterious, but there are at least two things which afford us help thereon: the fact that it is a "renewing" (Titus 3:5), and that it is a real and radical (though not complete or final) reversal of what happened to us at the fall. The old creation gives us some idea of the new creation, and the order in which the former was wrecked prepares us to grasp the order in which the latter is effected. Natural man is a composite being, made up of spirit and soul and body. The "spirit" seems to be the highest part of his nature, being that which capacitates for God-consciousness or the knowledge of God—He being "spirit" (John 4:24). The "soul" or ego appears to be that which, expressing itself through the body, constitutes what is termed our "personality," and is the seat of self-consciousness, and by it man has communion with his fellows. The body or physical organism is that which provides the soul with a habitation in this world, and it is the seat of sense-consciousness, being that through which man has contact with material things. The order of Scripture is "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), but man with his customary perversity invariably reverses it and speaks of "body, and soul and spirit." How that reveals what man has degenerated into: the body, which he can see and feel, which occupies most of his concern, and comes first in his consideration and estimation. His "soul" receives little thought and still less care, and as to his "spirit" he is unaware that he has any. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). God is tri-une, there being three persons in one and indivisible Divine essence. And it was in the image of the triune God that man was made, as the plural pronouns plainly connote. Thus man was made a tri-une creature. His "spirit" which is the intellectual principle and highest part, was capacitated for communion with God and was designed to regulate (by its wisdom) the soul, in which resides the emotional nature or the "affections." The soul in turn was to regulate the body, as it received through the physical senses information of the external world. Hilt at the fall man reversed the order of his creation: making a "god" of his belly he henceforth became enslaved to the lower world, and the soul instead of directing the physical mechanism became to a large extent the lackey of its senses and demands. Communion with God being severed, the spirit no longer functioned according to its distinctive nature, and though not extinguished, was dragged down to the level of the soul. What has just been pointed out should be clearer to the reader by pondering it in the light of Genesis 3. In assailing Eve, Satan made his

attack upon her spirit—the principle which receives from God—for he first called into question the Divine prohibition (v. 2) and then, replying to her objection, assured her "ye shall not surely die," and added as an inducement "in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4, 5), thereby seeking to weaken her faith, and flatter her ambition by promising greater wisdom. Harkening to his lies, the Woman was "deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14). Her judgment became clouded through doubting God's threat, and once the light of God in her spirit was lost, all was lost. Her affections became corrupted so that she now "desired" or lusted after the forbidden fruit—not by the prompting of her spirit, but by the solicitation of her physical senses: and her will became depraved so that she "took" thereof. Now, from the experimental side of things, regeneration is the initial work of God in reversing the effects of the fall, for its favored subject is then "renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10): that is to say, spiritual perception is restored to him, so that he now has again what he lost in Adam—a vital, powerful, direct knowledge of God. In consequence of this he is brought back again into communion with God, restored to a conscious fellowship with Him. One aspect of this mysterious but blessed work is brought before us in Hebrews 4:12 where we are told, "the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." We understand that last clause to signify that the regenerated person's "spirit" is now freed from its Immersion into the soul and is raised to its own superior level, being placed en rapport (brought into harmony with) God Himself. Thus Paul declares "I serve [God] with my spirit" (Rom. 1:9)—not "soul"; and "my spirit prayeth" (1 Cor. 14:14). In distinction therefrom "purified your souls [affections] in obeying the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Though the above may sound recondite and, being new to our readers, somewhat difficult to grasp, yet it should, we think, be more or less clear that in order for us to answer to what God has wrought in us, in order to live as becometh Christians, the body should take second place to the soul and be ruled thereby: and the soul in turn be subordinated to the spirit, which is to be enlightened and controlled by God. Unless the body be made subservient to the soul, man lives his life on the same level as the animals; and unless the Christian's "affections" and emotions be regulated by wisdom from the spirit, he lives on the same plane as the unregenerate. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). That means, make the things of the spirit your paramount concern, and your lower interests will be automatically subserved. If the mind or spirit be "stayed on God," the soul will enjoy perfect peace, and the soul at rest will act beneficially on the body. Thus, in proportion as our lives accord with what took place in us at the new birth will be our spiritual growth and prosperity. Nothing but a knowledge of God can satisfy the spirit of man, as nought but His love can content the soul. Man's supreme happiness consists in the exercise of his noblest parts and faculties on their proper objects, and the more excellent those objects be, the more real and lasting pleasure do they give us in the knowledge and love of them. Thus it is that, when God has designs of mercy toward an individual, He begins by shining upon his understanding and attracting his heart unto himself. As that work of grace proceeds that individual is enabled to see something of "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13), how it has deluded him into vainly imagining that the things of time and sense could afford him satisfaction, until he discovers that (to use the figurative language of the prophet) he has "spent his money for that which is not bread" and "labored for that which satisfieth not." (Isa. 55:2) Therefore does God say unto him, "hearken unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Until God becomes our "Portion" the soul is left with an aching void. Here, then, is what occurs at regeneration: God "hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true" (1 John 5:20)—and this He does by quickening the "spirit" in us. And again we read "For God who [in connection with the first creation, Gen. 1:3] commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath [in His work of the new creation] shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2

Cor. 4:6). Thus, Christian progress must consist in our advancing in a personal and experimental knowledge of God, and consequently when the apostle prayed for the spiritual growth of the Colossians he made request that they might be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:10). Simultaneously with this communication of a supernatural knowledge of Himself, the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5) and therefore spiritual growth consists of a deeper apprehension and fuller enjoyment of that love with a more complete response thereto; and hence when making request for the same on behalf of the Ephesians Paul prayed that they might "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (3:19). It is not our immediate design to give as full a description as our present light affords of the precise nature of regeneration, but only to point out those of its principal elements which the better enables us to grasp what spiritual growth consists of. We will therefore mention but one other feature of the new birth, or that which is at least an inseparable adjunct of it, namely, the impartation of faith. Nor shall we now attempt to define what faith is: sufficient for the moment to acknowledge that it is a blessed "gift of God" (Eph. 2:8), in nowise originating in the exercise of the human will, but communicated by "the operation of God" (Col. 2:12), and therefore it is a supernatural principle, active in its favored recipient, bringing forth fruit after its own kind, and thereby evidencing its Divine source. It is "by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) the Christian walks: as said the apostle "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God [He being its Object], who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This it is which distinguishes all the regenerate from the unregenerate, for the latter are "children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32: 20; cf. 2 Thess. 3:3). The Christian life begins by the exercise of a God-given faith, namely, an act whereby we receive Christ as our own personal Saviour (John 1:1). We are "justified by faith," and by Christ "have access by faith into this grace [i.e., accepted into God's favor] wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:1, 2). We are "sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18), that is, made actual participants of the ineffable purity of Christ. Through the Spirit we "wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5; cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). It is by "the shield of faith," and that alone, we are able to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:12). It is "through faith and patience" that we "inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). It was by faith that the Old Testament saints "obtained a good report" (Heb. 11:3) and wrought such wonders as the remainder of that chapter demonstrates. It is by faith we successfully resist the Devil (1 Peter 5:9) and overcome the world (1 John 5:4). From all of which it is very evident that the Treasure of our Christian progress will be very largely determined by the extent to which this principle be kept healthy and remains operating in us. To sum up what has been pointed out above: regeneration is both a "renewing" and a "new creation." As a "renewing" it is a continual process, as 2 Corinthians 4:16 clearly shows. This aspect of it is a partial reversal of and recovery from what happened to us at the fall. It is a Divine quickening, which necessarily presupposes an entity or faculty already existing, though in need of being made alive or revived. This "renewing" is of the inner man, which includes both spirit and soul or "the mind" and "heart." It is an initial and radical act, followed by a repeated but imperceptible process whereby the nobler or immaterial parts of our beings are elevated or refined. This does not mean that "the flesh" or evil principle in us undergoes any improvement, but that our faculties are spiritualized; and thus spiritual growth will consist of the mind being more and more engaged with Divine objects, the affections being increasingly set upon things above, the conscience becoming more tender, and the human will being made more amenable to the Divine, and thereby the inner man more and more conformed to the holy image of Christ. But regeneration is something more than a "renewing" or quickening of parts and faculties already in existence: it is also a "new creation," the bringing into existence of something which did not exist before, the actual bestowment of something to the sinner in addition to all that he had as a natural man. That "something" is variously designated in Scripture (and by theologians) according to its different relations and aspects. It is termed "life" (1 John 5:12), yea life "more abundantly" (John 10:10) than unfallen Adam

enjoyed. It is named "spirit" because "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6) and therefore is to be distinguished from our natural spirit; and "the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). It is called "the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 1:22), being a token or firstfruits of what will be ours when glorified; and "grace" (Eph. 4:7) as an inward principle. Theologians designate it "the new nature," and many allude to it under the composite term of "the Christian's graces," which is warranted by John 1:16, and is probably the easiest for us to comprehend. Considered thus, spiritual growth may be said to be the development of our graces: the strengthening of faith, the enlarging of hope, the increasing of love, the abounding of peace and joy: see 2 Peter 1:3 and carefully note verses 5-8. Thus far we have been dwelling almost entirely upon the internal aspect of our theme, so we will now quote one verse which directs attention to the external side. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Here is the response which we are required to make unto the new birth. God's purpose in our new creation or regeneration is that we should "walk in good works" that we may make manifest the spiritual root which He then implanted by bearing spiritual fruit. Such was the design of Christ in dying for us: to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14) From which it plainly follows that, the more zealous we are of good works and the more steadfastly we walk in them, the more do we rightly answer to what God has wrought in us. Now the performance of our daily duties are so many "good works," if they be done from faith's obedience to God's requirements and with an eye to His approbation and glory. Hence the more faithfully and conscientiously we discharge our obligations toward God and toward our fellows, the more true Christian progress we are making. All that has been before us above receives simplification when it is viewed in the light of conversion and its proper sequel. Regeneration is entirely the work of God, wherein we are passive, but conversion is an act of ours; the one being the effect and consequence of the other. The word "conversion" means to turn around, it is a right-about-face. It is a turning from the world unto God, from Satan unto Christ, from sin unto holiness, from being absorbed with the things of time unto devotion to our eternal interests. At regeneration we received a supernatural knowledge of God, and as the consequence, in His light we see ourselves as depraved, lost and undone. At regeneration we received a nature which is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24), and as a consequence we now hate all unrighteousness and sin. At regeneration we were given an understanding that we might know Him that is true (1 John 5:20) and our response is to yield ourselves unto His dominion and trust in His atoning blood. At regeneration we received Divine "grace" as an indwelling principle, and the effect is to make us willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Christ. The proper sequel to such a conversion is that we steadfastly adhere to the surrender we then made of ourselves unto the Lord Jesus, and the more we do so such will be our spiritual progress. III

We have sought to show the principles from which spiritual growth issues and the main lines along which Christian progress advances, pointing out that spiritual growth is the development of the spiritual life communicated at regeneration. Now we shall look at the particular, seeking to set out in some detail of what that development actually consists. 1. Spiritual growth consists of an increase in spiritual knowledge. God works in us as rational creatures, according to our intelligent nature, so that nothing is wrought in us unless knowledge paves the way. We cannot speak a language unless we have some understanding of the same. We cannot do work with an implement or machine nor play on a musical instrument until we have a knowledge of them. The same obtains in connection with spiritual things. We cannot worship intelligently or acceptably an unknown God. He must first reveal Himself and be known by us, for we could not love or trust One with whom we had no acquaintance. Therefore does God's Word declare "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Ps. 9:10). It cannot be otherwise: once God is revealed to us as a living reality, the heart at once confides itself to Him, as being definitely worthy of its fullest reliance and

dependence. It is spiritual ignorance of God which lies at the foundation of all our distrust of Him, and therefore of all our doubts and fears: "Acquaint now thyself with, him and be at peace" (Job 22:21). The Christian life begins in knowledge, for "the new man is renewed in knowledge" (Col. 3:10). "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). There has been much difference of opinion among commentators as to the scope of these words. When, we wrote thereon many years ago we adopted the view of the majority of Christian writers, namely, a declaration of the way and means by which eternal life is obtained: just as the words that follow "this is the condemnation" in John 3:19 do not define the character of that condemnation, but rather tell us the cause of it. While we still believe in the legitimacy and soundness of the interpretation we gave formerly, yet a more mature reflection would not restrict the meaning of John 17:3 to that explanation, but would also understand it to signify that "eternal life" (of which we now have but the promise and earnest) or everlasting bliss and glory will consist of an ever-increasing knowledge of the triune God as revealed in the Person of the Mediator. This knowledge does not consist in theological thoughts or metaphysical speculations about the Godhead, but in such spiritual understanding of Him as causes us to believe in the Lord God, to cast our souls upon Him, and center in Him as our everlasting Portion. "The renewed understanding is raised up and enlightened with a supernatural life, so that what we know of the Lord is by intuitive knowledge which the Holy Spirit is most graciously pleased to give. Hence believers are said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light, and Paul says 'ye were sometime darkness but now are ye light in the Lord.' As the knowledge of the Father, Son and Spirit is reflected upon the renewed mind in the person of Christ, so it is received into the heart." (S. F. Pierce) This spiritual apprehension of God is such as no outward means can of themselves convey: no, not even the reading of the Word or hearing it preached. In addition thereto, God by His own light and power conveys to the human spirit such an effectual discovery of Himself as radically affects the understanding, conscience, affections and will, reforming the life. As the Christian life begins in spiritual knowledge so it is increased thereby: "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), upon which we quote again from the excellent Pierce. "I conceive that by grace here all those faculties, graces, habits, dispositions, which are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit are to be understood. And to have our spiritual faculties, graces, habits, and dispositions exercised distinctively and supernaturally on their proper objects and subjects is to 'grow in grace.' What follows in the text is explanatory: 'and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' He is the Object on which all our graces are to be exercised. He is the life of all our graces. Therefore growing into a greater knowledge of Him, and the Father's love in Him, is to 'grow in grace,' for thereby all our graces are quickened, strengthened, exercised and drawn forth to the praise of God." While we do not think that exhausts the meaning of 2 Peter 3:18, yet such an interpretation is borne out by the second verse of the Epistle: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord"—not by the knowledge of God alone, nor of the Lord Jesus alone, but of God in Christ the Mediator, which is also the force of John 17:3. One of the ways by which we may ascertain what spiritual growth consists of is by attending to the recorded prayers of the apostles and noting what it was for which they made request. Being very eminent themselves in grace and holiness, it was their earnest desire that the churches and particular individuals to whom their Epistles were addressed, might increase and greatly flourish in those Divine bestowments. Accordingly in his prayer for the Ephesians we find Paul petitioning that the Father of glory would give unto them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him," that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened that they might know what is the hope of His calling (vv. 17, 18). It should be obvious that in asking for such favors for those saints there was no implication that they were entirely devoid of them or that he sought the initial bestowment of them—any more than John 20:31 signifies the Fourth Gospel was addressed to

unbelievers (1:16 proves otherwise) or that his First Epistle was sent to Christians lacking in assurance; rather does 1 John 5:13 connote "that ye may have a clearer and fuller knowledge that eternal life is yours." No, in making those petitions on behalf of the Ephesian saints Paul requested that a larger degree of heavenly light might be furnished unto their minds, that they might have a more spiritual apprehension of the One with whom they had to do, of His wondrous perfections according to the revelation, He has made of Himself in the Word, and of his varied relationships to them. It was that they might discern the wonders of His grace and power toward, in, and for them. It was that they might have an enlarged conception and perception of their vivication when they were in a state of death and sin. In like manner, he prayed that the love of the Philippian saints might "abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment" (1:9). So for the Colossians, that they might be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:10), which is to be taken in its fullest sense: increasing in the knowledge of God in the manifestation He has made of Himself in creation, in providence and in grace; in knowledge of God in His three Persons, in His Christ the Mediator, in His law, in His gospel; in the knowledge of His holy will. This knowledge of God, which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate, which the apostle solicited on behalf of his converts, and which is the basic element in all real Christian progress, is something vastly different from and superior to the mere possession of a correct opinion about God or any speculative view concerning Him. It is a supernatural and saving knowledge. A mere theoretical knowledge of God is inoperative and ineffectual, but an experimental acquaintance with Him is dynamical and transforming. It is a knowledge which deeply affects the heart, producing reverential awe, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). It is such a knowledge as strengthens the Christian's graces and calls them forth into lively exercise. Since that Divine light and power is communicated to the saint by the Spirit through the Scriptures, it causes him to search and ponder them as he never did previously, and to mix faith with what he reads and takes in. It is such a knowledge as promotes holiness in the heart and piety in the life. It is a knowledge which produces obedience to the Divine commandments, as 1 John 2:3, 4 plainly teaches. Yet there can be no such knowledge of God except as lie is apprehended through Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Such a knowledge of God lies at the foundation of everything else in the spiritual life, being both essential and introductory. Without such a knowledge of God we cannot know ourselves, how to order our lives in this world, nor what awaits us in the world to come: until made acquainted with Him who is light (1 John 1:5) we are in complete darkness. Calvin evinced the profundity of his spiritual insight by commencing his renowned Institutes in saying, "True and substantial wisdom primarily consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." Without a personal and spiritual knowledge of God we cannot perceive the infinite evil of sin and the fearful havoc it has wrought in us: it is only in His light that we "see light" (Ps. 36:9) and discover the horribleness and totality of our depravity. Then it is that we both behold and feel ourselves to be just as God has described us in His Word, Equally so it is only by such knowledge of God that we can appreciate the Divinely-provided remedy: either in discovering wherein it consists or realizing our dire need of the same. "The way of the wicked is as darkness" (Prov. 4:19). From all that has been pointed out above we may see how completely dependent the Christian is upon God: no spiritual progress is possible except as He continues to shine upon us. Neither a powerful intellect, the artificial aids of philosophy, nor a thorough training in logic, can contribute one iota unto a spiritual apprehension of Divine things. True, they are of use in enabling the teacher to discourse thereon, to express himself more readily and fluently than the illiterate, but as to discovering to him Divine truth they are of no value whatever. The reason of this is evident: celestial things are high above the reach of carnal reason, and therefore it can never attain unto an acquaintance with their true nature. Heavenly grace is required for an entrance into heavenly things, and the meanest capacity is as susceptible to heavenly grace as the most capacious mind. Moreover, the things of God are addressed to faith, and that is a grace of which the

unregenerate, be he the most accomplished savant, is utterly devoid. Divine mysteries are hidden from the naturally wise and prudent. but they are supernaturally revealed to spiritual babes (Matthew 11:25)—revealed by the Holy Spirit through a Divinely-imparted faith. An uneducated Christian may not be able to enter into the subtle niceties of theological metaphysics, he may not be competent to debate the Truth, with ingenious objectors, but he is capable of understanding the character and perfections of God, the person and work of Christ, the mysteries and wonders of redemption so as to obtain such a gracious view thereof as to excite in his mind a holy adoration of the Father and a love for and joy in the Redeemer. And such a knowledge, and that alone, will stand us in stead in the time of trial, the hour of temptation, or the article of death. Yet it is only as the Holy Spirit is pleased to give fresh light and life to the believer's mind by bringing home anew by His own unction and efficacy what is already known that he can increase in the spiritual knowledge thereof. What God has revealed in His Word must be applied again and again by the Spirit if it is to be operative in us and bear fruit through us. The believer is as much dependent upon God for any increase of spiritual knowledge as he was for the first reception of it, and constantly does he need to bear in mind that humbling word "without me ye can do nothing." If we added nothing to the last paragraph we should present a most unbalanced view of this point, conveying the impression that we had no responsibility in the matter. As there is a radical difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, so there is between our first spiritual knowledge of God and our increase in the same. "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord" is a Divine exhortation, intimating both our privilege and our duty. We are required to make diligent use of the means God has provided, for He places no premium on slothfulness. Though we are dependent upon the Spirit to apply the Truth to us, yet that does not signify that it will make no difference whether or not we keep the things of God fresh in our minds by daily meditation upon them. Only God can bring His Word home to our hearts in living power, nevertheless we must pray "quicken thou me according to thy Word" (Ps. 119:25). Moreover it is our obligation to abstain from whatever would grieve the Spirit and thereby weaken the assurance which enables us to say "my Father" and "my Redeemer." If we increase not in the knowledge of God the fault is ours.

2. Spiritual growth consists of a deeper delight in spiritual things and objects. This is ever the accompaniment and effect of spiritual knowledge—affording us another criterion by which we may test the kind of knowledge we have. A merely speculative knowledge of Divine things is cold and lifeless, but a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with them affects the heart and moves the affections. One may accept much of God's Word (through early training) in a traditional way, and even be prepared to contend for the same against those who oppose it, yet it will avail nothing when the Devil assails him. Hence we are told that when the Wicked One is revealed, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, God permits him to work "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish," and His reason for this is stated to be: "because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10). At best they had only a letter acquaintance with the truth: it was never enshrined in their affections. But different far is it with the regenerate: each of them can say with the Psalmist "O how love I thy law: it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). Spiritual delight necessarily follows spiritual knowledge, for an object cannot be appreciated any further than it is apprehended and known. Spiritual knowledge of spiritual things imparts not only a conviction of their verity and the certainty of their reality, but it also produces the soul's adherence to them, the cleaving of the affections unto them, a holy joy in them, so that they appear inexpressibly blessed and glorious unto those granted a discovery of the same. But not having been admitted into the secret thereof, the unregenerate can form no true concept or estimate of the Christian's experience, and when he hears him exclaiming of the things of God "More are they to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey or the honey-comb" (Ps. 19:10), he can but regard such language as wild enthusiasm or fanaticism. The natural

man lacks both the power to discern the beauty of spiritual things and a palate to taste their sweetness. Nor is the believer's relish for God's Word confined unto the promises and comforting portions: he also declares "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Ps. 119:47). The more the believer advances in spiritual acquaintance with the excellency and beauty of heavenly things, the more solid satisfaction do they afford his mind. The more the Christian enters into the importance and value of God's eternal Truth the more his heart is drawn out unto the glorious objects revealed therein. The more that he actually tastes that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2:3), the more will he delight himself in Him. The more light he is granted upon the sublime mysteries of the Faith, the more will he admire the wondrous wisdom which devised them, the power which executed them, the grace which conveyed them. The more he realizes the Scriptures are the very Word of God himself, the more he is awed by their solemnity and impressed with their weightiness. The more the ineffable perfections of Deity are revealed to his spirit, the more will he exclaim "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods [or "mighty ones"], who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" (Ex. 15:11). And the more his heart is occupied with the person, office, and the work of the Redeemer, the more will he enter into the experience of him who said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:7). It is true that, through slackness and folly, the believer may to a considerable extent lose his relish for spiritual things, so that his reading of the Word affords him little satisfaction and delight. One who eats and drinks unwisely upsets his stomach, and then the palate no longer finds the choicest food agreeable to him. It is thus spiritually. If the believer be out of communion with God and turns to the world for satisfaction, he loses his appetite for the heavenly manna. Wherefore we are bidden to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted word" (James 1:21): there must be this "laying apart" before there can be an appreciative reception of the Word. So again 1 Peter 2:1 shows us that there are certain lusts which have to be mortified if we are to "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby." If such exhortations be duly heeded, and the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, then shall we be found "singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16) with an ever-deepening joy in Him. IV

3. Spiritual growth consists in a greater love for God. When pointing out the various aspects of regeneration (in chapter 6) we quoted Romans 5:5: "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Contrary to the commentators we do not regard the reference there as being to God's love for His people, but rather one of the blessed effects or consequences of the same. First, because the scope and unity of the whole context requires such an interpretation. In 5:1-11 the apostle enumerates the sevenfold result of our being justified by faith: we have peace with God (v. 1), we are established in His favor (v. 2), we rejoice in hope (v. 2), we are enabled to benefit from trials (vv. 3, 4), we have a hope that fails not (v. 5), our hearts are drawn out to God (v. 5), we are assured of final preservation (vv. 8-10). Second, the relation of the second half of v. 5 ("because") to the first leads to the same conclusion: it is our love to God which furnishes evidence that our hope is a valid one. Third, God's love for us is in Himself, and though manifested unto us could scarcely be said to be "shed abroad in our hearts." Verse 8 clearly distinguishes His love toward us. By nature the elect have not one particle of love for God; nay, their very minds are "enmity" against Him (Rom. 8:7). But He does not leave them forever in that fearful state. No, having from eternity set His heart upon them, He has determined to win their hearts unto Himself. And how is that accomplished? By shedding abroad His love in their hearts, which we understand to denote, by communicating from Himself a spiritual principle of love which qualifies and enables them to love Him. Faith is His gift to them (Eph. 2:8), and the evidence of that principle being in them is that they now believe and trust in Him. Hope is also His gift to them (2 Thess 2:16), for prior to regeneration we had "no hope" (Eph. 2:12), and the evidence of that principle being in us is that we have a

confident expectation of the future. In like manner, love is also a Divine gift, and the evidence of that principle being in an individual is that he now loves God, loves His Christ, loves His image in His people. Note how in Romans 5 we have the Christian's faith (v. 1). hope (vv. 4. 5) and love (v. 5)—which are the three great dynamics and regulators of the Christian life. This Divine virtue which is communicated to the hearts of all Christians is that which moves their affections to cleave unto God in Christ as their supreme Good, it is designated "the love of God" because He is the Bestower of it, because He is the Object of it, and because He is the Increaser and Perfecter of it. It is first stirred unto action or drawn out to God, then the soul apprehends His love for him, for "we love God because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19), for so long as we feared this wrath we hated Him. This particular grace is the one which most affects the others: if the heart be kept right the head will not go far wrong; but when love cools, every grace languishes. Hence we find the apostle praying for the Ephesian saints that they might be "rooted and grounded in love" (3:17). As the Christian grows he learns to love God not only for what He has done for him but chiefly for what He is in Himself—the infinitely glorious One, the Sun of all perfection. Yet our love for Him is easily chilled—through the heart's being turned unto other objects. In fact, of all of our graces this one is the most sensitive and delicate and needs the most cherishing and guarding (Matthew 24:12; Rev. 2:5). The force of what has just been pointed out appears in that exhortation "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). Negatively, that means, avoid everything which would chill and dampen it: careless living soon dulls our sense of God's love. Eschew whatever would grieve the Spirit or thereby give Him occasion to convict us of our sins and occupy us with our waywardness, instead of taking the things of Christ and showing them unto us (John 16:14). Shun the embraces of the world, keeping yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). Positively, it signifies: use the appointed means for keeping your affections warm and lively, set on things above. Familiarize yourself with God's Holy Word, regarding it as a series of letters from your heavenly Father. Cultivate communion with Him by prayer and frequent meditations on His perfections. Keep up a fresh sense of His love for you, sunning your soul in the enjoyment of it. Above all, adhere strictly to the path of obedience. When the Lord Jesus bade us "continue ye in my love" he at once went on to explain how we may do so: "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:9, 10; cf. 1 John 5:3). A deeper and increasing love for God is not to be ascertained so much by our consciousness of the same as by the evidences it produces. There are many who sing and talk about how much they love Christ, but their walk gives the lie to their avowals. On the other hand there are some who bemoan the feebleness of their love and the coldness of their affections whose lives make it manifest that their hearts are true to Him. Feelings are no safe criterion in this matter: it is conduct which is the surest index to it. Moreover it must be borne in mind that the holiest saint who ever walked this earth, who enjoyed the most intimate fellowship with the Lord, would be the first to acknowledge and bewail the inadequacy of his affection for Him whose love passeth knowledge. Nevertheless there is such a thing as a growing love for God in Christ, and the same is demonstrated by a stronger bent of soul toward Him, the mind being more stayed upon Him, the heart enjoying more communion with Him and greater delight in Him, and the conscience increasingly exercised in our care to please Him. The more we are spiritually engaged with God's love for us, the more will our affections to Him be enflamed.

4. Spiritual growth consists of the strengthening and enlarging of our faith. Faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8), by which is signified that it is a spiritual principle, grace or virtue which He communicates to the hearts of His elect at their regeneration. And as His "talents" are bestowed upon us to trade with, to profit by and increase, so the principle of faith is given us to use and employ to the glory of God. Its first act is to believe Christ, trust in Him, and as Colossians 2:6 bids us, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." This is a most comprehensive and summarized exhortation, and would require many details in order to furnish a full explanation of it. For

example, it might be pointed out that the Christian is called upon to walk humbly, dependently, submissively or obediently; yet all of these are included in faith itself. Faith is a humbling and self-emptying grace, for it is the stretching forth of the beggar's hand to receive God's bounty. Faith is an acknowledgment of my own insufficiency and need, a leaning upon One who is mighty to save. Faith is also an act of the will whereby it surrenders to the authority of Christ and receives Him as King to reign over our hearts and lives. Thus, though there is much more in it than this, yet the prime and essential force of Colossians 2:6 is: as ye have become Christians at the first by an act of faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, continue trusting in Him and let your life be regulated by faith—"walk" denotes progress or going forward. In Hebrews 10:38 we are told "now the just shall live by faith." A very elementary statement is that, yet one which is turned into a serious error the moment we tamper with or change its pronoun. We are not justified because of our faith, but because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, but that righteousness is not actually reckoned to our account until we believe—instrumentally we are "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1). Nor are the justified bidden to "live upon their faith," though many vainly try to do so. No, the believer is to live upon Christ, yet it is only by faith that he can do so. Let us be as simple as possible: I break my fast with food, yet I partake of that food by means of a spoon. I feed myself, yet it is the food and not the spoon I eat. It was said of Esau, "by thy sword shalt thou live" (Gen. 27:40), not on thy sword—he could not eat it. Esau would live on what his sword brought in. The Christian makes a serious blunder when he attempts to live upon the faith he fancies he can find or feel within himself: rather is he to feed upon the Word, and this he does only so far as his faith is operative—as faith lays hold of and appropriates its holy and blessed contents. "Now the just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:28) may well be regarded as the text of the sermon which follows immediately in the next chapter, for in Hebrews 11 we are shown at great length and in considerable variety of detail how the Old Testament saints exercised that God-given principle, how they lived by faith, and wrought great wonders by it. Nothing is there said of their courage, zeal, patience, but all their works and triumphs are attributed to faith: the reason for this being that their courage, zeal, and patience were the fruits of faith. As it was with them, so it is with us: we are called to "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7) and the extent to which we do so will determine the measure of success or failure we have in our Christian lives. As the Lord Jesus declared unto the two blind beggars who besought His mercy, "according to your faith I'll do it unto you" (Matthew 9:29) and to the father of the demon-possessed child "all things are possible to him that believeth," (Mark 9:23). If we are straightened it is not in God but in ourselves, for He ever responds to reliance in and counting upon His intervention. He has expressly promised to honor those who honor Him, and nothing honors Him more than a firm and childlike faith in Him. "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Such a testimony from the chief of the apostles shows us the place which faith has in the Christian life. This expression "the faith of the Son of God" signifies that He is the grand Object of faith, the One on whom it is to be exercised—which should help the reader to a better understanding of "the love of God" in Romans 5:5 and our remarks thereon. The Christian's life is essentially a life of faith, and in proportion as his faith is not operative does he fail to live the Christian life. A life of faith consists of faith being engaged with Christ, drawing on him, receiving from Him the supply of every need. The life of faith begins by looking to Christ, trusting in Him, relying wholly upon Him as our righteousness before God, and it is continued by looking to and trusting in Him for everything else. Faith is to look to Christ for wisdom that we may be able to understand all that He has revealed concerning God, concerning ourselves, salvation, and various duties. Faith is to lay hold of His precepts and appropriate His promises. But more especially, faith is to look to Christ for strength to perform His precepts acceptably. As we have no righteousness of our own, so no strength: we are as dependent upon Him for the one as for the other, and each is obtained from Him by faith. But at this most vital point many of the Lord's people have been

grievously misled. Under the guise of debasing the creature and exalting Divine grace, they have been made to believe that they are quite helpless in this matter: that as God alone is the Imparter of faith, so He alone is the Increaser of it, and that they have to meekly submit to His will as to the measure of faith He bestows or as to what He withholds from them. The consequence is that so far from their faith increasing, they are for the most part left to spend their remaining days on earth in a state full of doubting and fears. And what is still worse, many of them feel the blame or reproach for the feebleness of their faith, but instead, blatantly attribute it to the sovereignty of God. If such people rebuked a godless drunkard for his intemperance, they would be justly shocked were he to reply "God has not given me grace to overcome my thirst"; and yet when they are reprov'd for their unbelief they virtually charge God with it, by saying that He has not granted them a larger measure of faith. What a wicked slander! What a horrible misuse of the truth of God's sovereign grace! The blame is theirs, and they should honestly acknowledge it and peni

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