

Spiritual Growth 5. Its Analogy

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

Spiritual Growth

5. Its Analogy

I

An "analogy" is an agreement or correspondence in certain respects between things which otherwise differ, and just as it is often an aid to obtaining the force of a word by considering its synonyms, so it frequently helps us to a better understanding of a subject or object to compare it with another and ascertain the analogy between them. This method was frequently used by our Lord in His public teaching, when He likened the "Kingdom of heaven" to a considerable variety of things. The same principle is illustrated by the figurative names which Scripture gives to the people of God. For example, they are called "sheep," and that not only because of the relation which they sustain to Christ their Shepherd, but also because there are many resemblances between the one and the other, God having designed that in different respects this animal more than any other should shadow forth the nature and character of a Christian. Much valuable instruction is obtained by tracing those resemblances. The same Divine wisdom which designated our Saviour both "the Lamb" and "the Lion" was exercised in selecting the various objects and creatures after which His children are figuratively named, and it behooves us to follow out the analogy between them and learn the lessons they are intended to impart. "That they might be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (Isa. 63:1). Both in the Old Testament and in the New this similitude is used of the saints. The Psalmist declared "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God" (52:8) and affirmed "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish" (92:12, 13). Our Saviour employed the same figure when He said "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit," and again, "Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matthew 7:17; 12:23)—thus every passage where "fruit" is mentioned is also an extension of the same emblem. In Romans 11 the apostle likened the nation of Israel to a "good olive tree" and Christendom to "a wild olive tree" (vv. 24, 17) in connection with their testimony before the world. The Saviour Himself was termed "the Branch of the Lord" and as One who should grow up before him "as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 4:2; 53:2), while He resembled Himself and His people in communion with Him to "the true vine" (John 15:1). Now it should be obvious from the frequency with which this similitude is used in the Scriptures that it must be a peculiarly instructive one. Some of the more prominent resemblances are quickly apparent. For example, their attractiveness. How the countryside and the mountain slopes are

beautified by the trees. And what is so lovely in the human realm as those who bear the image of Christ and show forth His praises! They may be despised by the unregenerate, but to an anointed eye God's children are "the excellent of all the earth," and how they be regarded by Him whose workmanship they are is revealed in those words "his beauty shall he as the olive tree" (Hos. 14:6). So, too, their usefulness. Trees provide a habitation for the birds, shade for the earth, nourishment for the creature, material for building, fuel for the relief of man against the cold. Many, too, are the uses which God makes of His people in this world. Among other things predicated of them, they are "the salt of the earth"—preserving the body politic from going to utter putrefaction. Before turning to that which bears most closely upon our present theme it should be particularly noted that it is not wild but cultivated trees which is the similitude used. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord . . . for he shall be like a tree planted by the waters" (Jer 17:7, 8). Observe how frequently this word "planted" occurs: "which the Lord hath planted" (Num. 24:6) and compare Psalm 92:13, 14; 104:16; Isaiah 61:3. They are the property of the Heavenly Husbandman (John 15:1; 1 Cor. 3:7-9) and the objects of His care. That it is which gives such solemn force to our Lord's words "every plant which my heavenly Father hath riot planted shall be rooted up (Matthew 15:13). This figure of the saints being "planted" by God—transferred from one soil or position to another—has at least a threefold reference. First, to God's eternal decree, when He took them out of the creature mass and chose them in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Second, to their regeneration, when lie lifts them out of the realm of death and makes them "new creatures in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). Third, to their translation, when they are removed from earth and planted in His celestial Paradise. But it is the growth of "trees" we must now consider. 1. They have the principle of growth within themselves. Trees do not grow spontaneously and immediately from external furtherances, but from their own seminal virtue and radical sap. And it is thus with the spiritual growth of Christians. At regeneration a Divine "seed" is planted in his heart (1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9) and that "seed" contains within itself a living principle of growth. We cannot define that "seed" more closely than to say a new life or spiritual nature has been communicated to the one born again. It is that which distinguishes the living children of God from the lifeless profession all around them. The latter may from external influences—such as the appeals and exhortations of preachers, the example of Christians, the natural convictions produced from reading the Word—be induced to perform all the outward duties of Christianity, but since their works issue not from a principle of spiritual life in the soul, they are not the fruits of holiness. That spiritual principle or Divine grace imparted is described by Christ as "the water" which He gives and which becomes within its possessor "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Thus it is the nature of Christians to grow as it is of trees with the seminal principle within them to do likewise. The tree bearing fruit whose seed is in itself" (Gen. 1:12)—first reference to "trees"! 2. They must be watered from above. Though trees have within themselves a vital principle yet they are not independent of provision from their Creator, being far from self-sustaining. Their growth is not something inevitable by virtue of their own seminal power, for in a protracted drought they wither and decay. Hence, when Scripture speaks of the growth of trees it is careful to ascribe it unto God's watering of them. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and showers upon the dry ground [interpreted by], I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Isa. 44:3, 4). "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow up as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon" (Hos. 14:5). Only as God waters vegetation will it thrive or even survive. It is so spiritually. The Christian is not self-sufficient and independent of God. Though he has a nature capable of growth, if left to itself that nature would die, for it is only a creature, even though a "new creature." Hence the believer needs to be "renewed in the inner man day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). 3. They grow silently and imperceptibly. The development of the small sapling into the towering tree is a process veiled in secrecy. "So is the kingdom of God: as if a man cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and

rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how" (Mark 4:26, 27). The growing of the free cannot be discerned by the keenest eye, except by the consequences and effects of it. It is equally thus with spiritual growth: it is unrecognizable to either ourselves or others. No matter how closely we observe the markings of our hearts or how introspective becomes our viewpoint, we cannot perceive the actual process. It is seen only by Him by whom it is wrought. Nevertheless it is made manifest by its effects and fruits: in the case of some more clearly than others. But though the process be secret the means are plain: in the case of trees—nourishment from the soil, moisture from the clouds, light and heat from the sun. So with the Christian: "meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Tim. 4:15)—that thy spiritual growth may be evident to those about thee.

4. They grow gradually. In the case of some trees it is a very slow experience; with others maturity is reached more quickly. Hence in one passage the growth of believers is likened unto that of a "cedar" (Ps. 92:12), whereas in another—where a recovered backslider is in view—it is said, "he shall grow as the lily" (Hos. 14:5). But in the majority of cases the development of spiritual life in the saints is a protracted process, being carried on by degrees, or as the prophet expressed it, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little" (Isa. 28:10). Our spiritual growth is produced and promoted by the gracious, wise, patient, and faithful operations of the Holy Spirit. No real Christian is ever satisfied with his growth: far from it, for he is painfully conscious of what little progress he has made and how far short of God's standard he comes. Nevertheless, if he uses the appointed means and avoids the hindrances, he will grow. But let us now endeavor to present the analogy more closely. First, the growth of a tree is upward. The vital principle within it is drawn out unto the sun above, attracted by its rays. Though rooted in the earth its nature is to move toward heaven, slowly but surely lifting its head higher and higher. Thus the growth of a tree is ascertained first and may be measured by its upward progress. And does not the analogy hold good in the spiritual realm? is it not thus with the saint? It is the very nature of that new life which he received at regeneration to turn unto its Giver. The first evidence of that life being imparted to the soul is his seeking unto God in Christ. The need of Him is now felt; His suitability is now perceived, and the heart is drawn out unto Him. As yet he may not be able intelligently to articulate the newborn desire in his heart, yet if that desire were put into Scriptural language it would be expressed thus: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1), for none else can now satisfy the newly-created thirst within him. In view of the last two chapters there is less need for us to develop this at length. The higher the top of a tree reaches toward heaven the further from the earth does it move. Ponder that, my reader, for it is a parable in action. Before regeneration your heart was wholly set upon this world and what it provides for its devotees; but when your heart was super-naturally illumined and you beheld "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6) the spell was broken, and you could no longer be content with the perishing baubles which hitherto enthralled you. True, the "flesh" may still lust after them, and if you yield to their solicitations your peace and joy will be dampened, and for a season disappointment and sorrow will be your portion; yet there is that within you now that is no longer contented with childish toys and that seeks after the One who bestowed that new nature. It is the normal thing for that spiritual life to grow, and if it does not, you are living far below your privileges. Such upward growth will consist of stronger yearnings after God, more constant and frequent seekings after Him, a closer acquaintance with Him, a warmer love for Him, more intimate communion with Him, a fuller conformity to Him, and a deeper joy in Him. As the believer grows Godward His glory becomes more and more his concern and the pleasing of Him in all his ways the main business of his life, so that he performs even common duties with an eye increasingly upon Him. Our personal and experimental knowledge of God increases by our "following on" to know Him (Hos. 6:3), for the more we seek to do His will the better we come to understand (John 7:17)

and admire the same. Truth is then sealed on the mind, the understanding is more quickened in the fear of the Lord, and our relish of God's ways is intensified. Holy Acts become holy habits and what was at first difficult and irksome becomes easy and pleasant. The more we "exercise ourselves unto godliness" (1 Tim, 4:7) the more we are admitted into its secrets. From a dim perception of spiritual mysteries we gradually attain unto "all riches of full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2) of them. The more we are weaned from the world, the keener relish do we have for spiritual things and the sweeter do they become to our taste. As God is better known, our love for Him increases and we set a higher esteem on Him, a greater delight in Him is experienced and more and more the heart pants after a full fruition of Him in glory. Not that the believer ever reaches a point where he is satisfied with his knowledge of God or pleased with his love for Him. There could be no more lamentable proof of spiritual deadness and fatal self-deception than a self-complacent view of our love for God. On the other hand, equally unwarrantable is it to conclude we are not the children of God at all because our love for Him is so feeble and faulty. It is not the love of a natural son for his father which constitutes him his child, though filial love is the proper effect of that relationship. An exalted conception of the character of the parent and of the sacredness of the relationship will render an affectionate child dissatisfied with himself and cause him to declare "I reproach myself daily that I love my father so little, and I can never repay him as I ought." That would be the language of filial relation. Yet he would not be warranted in arguing, Because I do not love him as I ought, I cannot be his child; or because I love him so little, I question very much if he loves me at all." Then why reason thus in connection with our heavenly Father! Summing up this aspect we may say that, the upward growth of a believer is expressed by his heavenly mindedness and the measure in which his affections are set upon things above. Second, the growth of a tree is downward. It takes a firmer hold of the soil. More particularly is that the case in hot countries, for there the tap root of a tree has to penetrate deeper and deeper into the earth in order to find its needed moisture. An allusion to this aspect of our analogy is found in Hosea 14:6 where the Lord promises Israel that he shall "cast forth [or, better, 'strike'—see margin] his roots as Lebanon," that is, as the cedars of Lebanon struck their roots deeper into the mountain slopes—cf. "his smell as Lebanon" in the next verse where the obvious reference is to the fragrant aroma of the cedars. The spiritual counterpart of this is found in such expressions as "being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17) and "continue in the faith, grounded and settled" (Col. 1:23), the two things being brought together in "rooted and built up in him and established in the faith" (Col. 2:7), which all speak in the language of our present similitude. As the believer grows spiritually he takes a firmer grip on Christ and "lays hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12), no longer touching merely "the hem of his garment." He becomes more settled in his knowledge and enjoyment of the Saviour's love and is established more securely in the faith so that he is less liable to be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:21). The young sapling has but a shallow and feeble grip on the earth and is therefore in greater danger of being uprooted by storms and gales; but the older tree, which has survived the hostile winds, has taken deeper root and is more secure, So it is spiritually; the young Christian is more susceptible to erroneous teachings, but those who are mature and established in the truth discern and refuse human fables. The more we are rooted in the love of Christ, governed by the fear of God, and have His Word dwelling richly in us, the less shall we be swayed by the fear of man, the customs of the world, or the assaults of Satan. But more specifically: the downward growth of a Christian consists in increasing humility or becoming more and more out of love with himself. And this of necessity for in exact ratio to his real growth Godward will be his growth downward. The more we grow upward, that is, the more we take into our renewed minds spiritual apprehensions of the perfections of God, the excellency of the Mediator and the merits of His work, the more are we made conscious of what is due the One and the Other, and the more deeply do we feel what

a poor return we have made unto them. If it be something deeper and more influential than a merely speculative or theoretical knowledge of the Father and the Son, if instead we be granted an experimental, vital, and affecting knowledge of them, then shall we be made thoroughly ashamed of ourselves, wholly dissatisfied with our love, our devotion, our conformity to their image. Such knowledge will humble us into the dust, making us painfully sensible of the coldness of our hearts, the feebleness of our graces, the leanness of our souls, and the corruptions which still indwell us. The more a tree grows downward, the deeper its roots become imbedded in the earth, the more firmly it is fixed and the stronger it becomes, having a greater power to resist the force of the tempest. It is neither the height nor the girth of the tree, but the depths of its roots and its clinging to the ground which gives it stability and security. So it is spiritually. For the believer to grow downward is for him to have less and less confidence in and dependence upon himself: "when I am weak, then am I strong"; for a consciousness of my weakness causes me to turn more and more unto God and cling to Him. "O our God, wilt thou not judge them, for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (2 Chron. 20:12)—that was the language of one who had grown downward. II

We have stated that increasing humility in a Christian corresponds to the downward growth of a tree. As the upward growth of a tree is accompanied by its becoming more deeply rooted in the ground, so the Christian's acquaintance with, love for, and delight in God, issues in a deeper self-depreciation and self-detestation. If the knowledge we have acquired of the Truth or if what we term our "Christian experience" has made us think more highly of ourselves and better pleased with our attainments and performances, then that is a sure proof we are completely deceived in imagining we have made any real growth upward. The grand design of the Scriptures is to exalt God and humble man, and the more we experimentally or spiritually know God the less we shall think of ourselves and the lower place shall we take before him. The knowledge which "puffeth up" is merely an intellectual or speculative one, but that which the Spirit imparts causes its recipient feelingly to own "I know nothing yet as I ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). The more the soul converses with God and the more it perceives His sovereignty and majesty, the more will he exclaim with Abraham, "I am dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). The more the believer is granted a spiritual view of the Divine perfections, the more will he acknowledge with Job, "I abhor myself" (42:5). The more the saint apprehends the ineffable holiness of the Lord, the more will he declare with Isaiah, "Woe is me? for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips" (6:5). The more he is occupied with the perfections of Christ, the more will he find with Daniel, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (10:8). The more he discerns the exalted spirituality of God's law, and how little his inner man is conformed thereto, the more will he groan in concert with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Rom. 7:24). In God's light we see ourselves, discover the horrible corruptions of our very nature, mourn over the plague of our own heart (1 Kings 8:38), and marvel at the continued longsufferance of God unto us. The truly humble person is not the one who talks most of his own unworthiness and is frequently telling of how such and such an experience abased him to the dust. "There are many that are full of expressions of their own vileness, who yet expect to be looked upon as eminent saints by others as their due; and it is dangerous for any so much as to hint the contrary or to carry it towards them any otherwise than as if we looked upon them as some of the chief of Christians. There are many that are much in crying out their wicked hearts and their great short-comings and unprofitableness, and speaking of themselves as though they looked on themselves as the meanest of the saints; who yet, if a minister should seriously tell them the same things in private, and should signify that he feared they were very low and weak Christians and that they had reason solemnly to consider of their great barrenness and unprofitableness and falling so much short of many others, it would be more than they could digest. They would think themselves highly injured and there would be danger of

a rooted prejudice in them against such a minister." (Jonathan Edwards) The same writer defined evangelical humility as the "sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart." That answerable frame of heart consists of being "poor in spirit," a sense of deep need, a realization of sinfulness and helplessness. The natural man compares himself with his fellows and prides himself that he is at least as good as his neighbors. But the regenerate person measures himself by the exalted standard which God has set before him, and which is perfectly exemplified in the example Christ has left him that he should "follow His steps;" and as he discovers how lamentably he falls short of that standard and how "far off" he follows Christ, he is filled with shame and contrition. This empties him of self-righteousness and causes him to depend wholly on the finished work of Christ. It makes him conscious of his weakness and fearful that he will suffer a sad fall, and therefore he looks above for help and cries, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe" (Ps. 119:117), Thus the truly humble person is the one who lives most outside of himself on Christ. This brings us to those oft-quoted but we fear little-understood words, "grow in grace" (2 Peter 3:18). Growth in grace is only too frequently confused with the development of the Christian's graces. That is why we selected a different title for this book than the one commonly accorded the subject. Growth in grace is but one aspect or part of spiritual growth and Christian progress. When a minister asked a simple countryside woman what was her concept of "growing in grace," she replied, "A Christian's growth in grace is like the growth of a cow's tail." Puzzled at her reply, he asked for an explanation. Whereupon she said, "The more a cow's tail grows, the nearer it comes to the ground; and the more a Christian grows in grace, the more does he take his place in the dust before God." Ah, she had been taught from above something with which many an eminent theologian and commentator is unacquainted. Growth in grace is a growth downward: it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves; it is a deepening realization of our nothingness; it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies. What is it to enter into a personal experience of saving grace? Is it not a feeling my deep need of Christ and the consequent perception of His perfect suitability to my desperate case?—to be acutely conscious that I am "sick" in soul and the betaking of myself to the great "Physician"? If so, then must not any advancement in grace consist of an intensification of the same experience, a clearer and fuller realization of my need of Christ? And such growth in grace results from a closer acquaintance and fellowship with Him: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2)—that is, a vital practical, effectual knowledge of Him. In His light we see light: we become better acquainted with ourselves, more aware of our total depravity, more conscious of the workings of our corruptions. Grace is favor shown to the undeserving; and the more we grow in grace the more we perceive our undeservingness, the more we feel our need of grace, the more sensible we are of our indebtedness to the God of all grace. Thereby are we taught to walk with God and to make more and more use of Christ. Every Christian reader will agree that if ever there was one child of God who more than others "grew in grace" it was the apostle Paul; and yet observe how he said "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves" (2 Cor. 3:5); and again, "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). What breathings of humility were those! But we can appeal to an infinitely higher and more perfect example. Of the Lord Jesus it is said that he was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and yet He declared "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Does the reader detect a slip of the pen in the last sentence? Since Christ was "full of grace and truth" we should have said "there fore [and not 'yet'] he declared, 'learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart'—the latter was the evidence of the former! Yes, so "meek and lowly in heart" was He that, though the Lord of glory, He declined not to perform the menial task of washing the feet of His disciples! And in proportion as we learn of Him shall we become meek and lowly in heart. Hence "and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" is explanatory of "grow in grace" in 2

Peter 3:18. True humility dwells only in a heart which has been supernaturally enlightened of God and which has experimentally learned of Christ, and the more the soul learns of Christ the more lowly will it become. Even in natural things it is the novice and not the savant who is the most conceited. A smattering of the arts and sciences fills its youthful possessor with an exalted estimate of his wisdom, but the further he prosecutes his studies the more conscious will he become of his ignorance. Much more so is this the case with spiritual things. An unregenerate person who becomes familiar with the letter of the Truth imagines he has made great progress in religion; but a regenerate person even after fifty years in the school of Christ deems himself a very babe in spirituality. The more a soul grows in grace, the more does he grow out of love with himself. In one of his early epistles Paul said, "I am the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9); in a later, "who am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8); in one of his last, "sinners, of whom I am chief!" (1 Tim. 1:15) Third, trees grow inwardly. This brings us to what is admittedly the hardest part of our subject. We have never made a study of botany, and even though we had it is doubtful if it would stand us in much stead on this point. That there must be an inward growth of the tree is obvious, though exactly what it consists of is another matter. Yet that need not surprise us, for if the analogy holds good here too, is not this uncertainty just what we should expect? Is not the inward growth of a Christian that aspect of his progress which is the most difficult to define, describe, and still more so to put into practice? Unless the tree grows inwardly it would not grow in any other direction, for its outward growth is but the development and manifestation of its vital or seminal principle. We must fall back then on general principles and exercise a little common sense, and say: the inward growth of a tree consists of an increase of its sap, a resisting of that which would injure, and the toughening of its tissues. The sap is the vital juice of all plants and its free circulation the determiner of its health and growth. The analogy of this in the Christian is the grace of God communicated to his soul, and his spiritual progress is fundamentally determined by his receiving fresh supplies of grace. At regeneration God does not impart to us a supply of grace sufficient for the remainder of our lives: instead, He has made Christ to be the grand Fountain of all grace, and we are required to continue betaking ourselves to Him for fresh supplies. The Lord Jesus has issued a free invitation: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37), which must not be restricted to our first approach. As long as the Christian remains on earth he is as needy as when he drew his first spiritual breath, and his need is supplied in no other way than by his coming to Christ daily for fresh supplies of His grace. Christ is "full of grace," and that fulness is available for His people to draw from (Heb. 4:16). "He giveth more grace . . . unto the humble" (James 4:6), that is, to those who "thirst," who are conscious of their need and who present themselves as empty vessels to be replenished. But there is another principle which operates and regulates our obtaining further supplies of grace: "For unto every one that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance" (Matthew 25:29; cf. Luke 8:18). The context shows that the one who "hath" is he who has traded with what had been bestowed upon him: in other words, the way to obtain more grace is to make a right and good use of what we already have. Why should Christ give more if we have not improved what He previously communicated? Faith becomes stronger by exercising it. And how does the Christian make a good use of grace? By heeding that all-important injunction, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). This is the great task which God has assigned to each of His children. The "heart" signifies the whole inner man—the "hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we become and do. The man is what his heart is, for "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). To guard and garrison the heart is the grand work God has appointed us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. Negatively, the keeping of the heart with all diligence signifies, excluding from it all that is opposed to God. It means keeping the imagination free from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear from all guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil

objects, the inner man from being dominated by sin and Satan. In a word it means, to mortify the "flesh" within us, with all its affections and lusts; to resist evil imaginations, nipping them in the bud; to strive against the swellings of pride, the workings of unbelief; to swim against the tide of the world; to reject the solicitations of the Devil. This is to be our constant concern and ceaseless endeavor. It means to keep the conscience tender to sin in its first approach. It means looking diligently after its cleansing when it has been defiled. For all of this much prayer is required, earnest seeking of God's assistance, His supernatural aid; and if it be sought trustfully it will not be sought in vain, for it is the grace of God which teaches us to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2:11, 12). Positively, the keeping of our hearts with all diligence signifies, the cultivation of our spiritual graces—called "the fruit of the spirit" (Gal. 5:22, 23). For the health, vigor, exercise and manifestation of those graces we are accountable. They are like so many tender plants which will not thrive unless they are given much attention. They are like so many tendrils on a vine which must be lifted from trailing on the ground, pruned and sprayed, if they are to be fruitful. They are like so many saplings in the nursery which need rich soil, regular watering, the warmth of the sun, if they are to thrive. Go carefully over the ninefold list given in Galatians 5:22, 23 and then honestly ask the question, What sincere effort am I really making to cultivate, to foster, to develop those graces? Compare too the sevenfold list of 2 Peter 1:5-7 and put to yourself a similar inquiry. When your graces are lively and flourishing and Christ draws near, you will be able to say "my Beloved is gone down into his garden to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies" (Song of Sol. 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear (cf. 1 Peter 3:4; 1 Tim. 1:5). "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Is that sufficiently realized by us? If it is, then we are making it our chief concern to keep our hearts with all diligence. "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26): until that be done, God will accept nothing from you. The prayers and praises of our lips, the offerings and labors of our hands, yea, a correct outward walk, are things of no value in His sight unless the heart beats true to Him. Nor will He accept a divided heart. And if I have really given Him my heart, then it is to be kept for Him, it must be devoted to Him, it must be suited to Him. Ah, my reader, there is much head religion, much hand religion—busily engaged in what is termed "Christian service, and much feet religion—rushing around from one meeting, "Bible Conference," "Communion" to another, but where are those who make conscience of keeping their hearts! The heart of the empty professor is like the vineyard of "the man void of [spiritual] understanding," namely, "all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof" (Prov. 24:30, 31). A very few words must suffice upon the third aspect of inward growth. In the case of a tree this consists in the toughening of its tissues or strengthening of its fibers—apparent from the harder wood obtained from an older one than from a sapling. The spiritual counterpart of that is found in the Christian attaining more firmness and fixedness of character, so that he is no longer swayed by the opinions of others. He becomes more stable, so that he is less emotional; and more rational, acting not from sudden impulse but from settled principle. He becomes wiser in spiritual things because his mind is increasingly engaged with the Word of God and his eternal concerns, and therefore more serious and sober in his demeanor. He becomes confirmed in doctrine and therefore more discerning and discriminating in whom he hears and what he reads. Nothing can move him from allegiance to Christ, and having bought the Truth he refuses to sell it (Prov. 23:23). he is not afraid of being called a bigot, for he has discovered that "liberality" is emblazoned prominently on the Devil's banner. Fourth, the growth of a tree is outward, seen in the spreading of its boughs and the multiplication of its branches. We have purposely devoted a greater space to those aspects of our subject on which we felt the reader most needed help. This one almost explains itself: it is the daily walk of the believer, his external conduct, which is in view. If the Christian has grown upward—that is, if he has obtained an increased vital and practical knowledge of God in Christ; if he has grown downward—that is, if he has

become thoroughly aware of his total depravity by nature and learned to have "no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3) to effect any improvement in himself; if he has grown inwardly—obtained fresh supplies of grace from Christ and has diligently used the same by striving against indwelling sin and by resolutely resisting his carnal and worldly lusts, and if he has improved that grace by diligently cultivating his spiritual graces in the garden of his heart; then that upward, downward, and inward growth will be (not simply "ought to be"), must be, clearly and unmistakably shown in his outward life. And how will that upward, downward, and inward growth be manifested by the Christian outwardly? Why, by a life of obedience to his Lord and Saviour. Out of love and gratitude unto the One who suffered and did so much for him, he will sincerely endeavor to please Him in all his ways. Realizing that he is not his own but bought with a price, he will make it his highest aim and earnest endeavor to glorify God in his body and in his spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). The genuineness of his desire to please God and the intensity of his purpose to glorify Him, will be evidenced by the diligence and constancy with which he reads, meditates upon and studies His Word. In searching the Scriptures his main quest will not be to occupy his mind with its mysteries, but rather to obtain a fuller knowledge of God's will for him; and instead of hankering after an insight into its typology or its prophecies he will be far more concerned in how to become more proficient in performing God's will. It is in the light of His Word he longs to walk, and therefore it is His precepts and promises, His warnings and admonitions, His exhortations and aids, he will most lay to heart. One of the New Testament exhortations is, "We request you, brethren, and beseech you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more (1 Thess. 4:1). One of its prayers is, "That ye might be filled with a knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." (Col. 1:9, 10) One of its promises is, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8) And one of its examples is, "And they [the parents of John the Baptist] were both righteous before God, walking in all commandments and ordinances of the law blameless." (Luke 1:6) In the light of those verses—each of which treats with outward growth—our duty and privilege is clear: what God requires from us and the sufficiency of His enablement for the same.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/spiritual-growth-5-its-analogy/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

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

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

www.sermonindex.net