

Spiritual Growth 8. Its Promotion

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Transcript

Spiritual Growth

8. Its Promotion

I

We have now arrived at what is perhaps the most important aspect of our subject—not from the doctrinal side but from the practical standpoint. It will avail us little to discover that there is a manifold needs-be why the Christian should grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, as it would advantage us nothing to be quite clear in our minds as to what Christian progress is not and what it really consists of, if we continue to be stationary. While it may awaken interest to learn that in certain fundamental respects the growth of saints is like unto trees in their upward, downward, inward and outward development, yet such information will prove of no real value unless the conscience be exercised thereby and there be definite effort on our part. Trees do not grow mechanically, but only as they derive nourishment from the soil and receive water and sunshine from above. It is instructive to find out there are different grades in God's family and to ascertain the characteristics of each, but of what service will that be to me unless I personally pass from spiritual infancy to youth and eventually become a "father" in Christ? While there is a close analogy between the manner of a Christian's growth and that of a tree, it must not be lost sight of that there is a real and radical difference between them considered as entities, for we are moral agents, accountable creatures, while they are not so; and it is the exercise of our moral agency and the discharge of our responsibility which is now to engage our attention. Spiritual growth is very far from being a fortuitous thing, which occurs irrespective of the use of suitable means, nor does it take place spontaneously or apart from the availing ourselves of our privileges and the performance of our duty. Rather is it the outcome of God's blessing upon our employment of the aids which He has provided and appointed and the orderly development of the different graces He has bestowed upon us. As it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual: there are certain things which foster and there are other things which hinder Christian progress, and it is the lasting obligation of the saint to make full use of the former and to resolutely avoid the latter. Spiritual growth will not be promoted while we remain indifferent and inactive, but only as we give the utmost diligence to attending unto the health of our souls. In seeking to treat of the spiritual growth of a saint it needs to be borne in mind that here, as everywhere in the Christian life, there are two different agents at work, two entirely different principles are concerned: there is both a Divine and a human side to the subject, and much wisdom and care are required if a proper and scriptural proportion is to be maintained. Those two agents are God and the saint; those two principles are the operations of

Divine sovereignty and the discharge of Christian responsibility. The difficulty involved—admittedly a real one—is to recognize the existence of each and to maintain a due balance between the one and the other. There is a real danger that we become so occupied with the believer's duty and his diligence in using the proper means, that he takes too much credit to himself and thereby robs God of His glory—as in large measure do the Arminians. On the other hand, equally real is the danger that we dwell so exclusively on the Divine operations and our dependence on the Spirit's quickening, that a spirit of inertia seizes us and we become reduced to unaccountable non-entities—as is the case with Fatalists and Antinomians. From either extreme we should earnestly seek deliverance. It is of vital importance at the outset that we clearly recognize that God alone can make His people grow and prosper, and that we should be deeply and lastingly sensible of our entire dependency upon Him. As we were unable to originate spiritual life in our souls, so we are equally unable to preserve or increase the same. Deeply humbling though that truth be unto our hearts, yet the declarations of Holy Writ are too implicit and too numerous to leave us in the slightest doubt upon it. "None can keep his own soul alive" (Ps. 22:29): true alike naturally and spiritually; positively, "O bless our God . . . which holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. 68:9). "Thou maintainest my lot" (Ps. 16:5) said Christ Himself. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength" (Ps. 68:28). "From me is thy fruit" (Hos. 14:8). "Thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12). "All my springs are in thee" (Ps. 87:7). "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Such flesh-withering statements as those cut away all ground for boasting and place the crown of honor where it rightfully belongs. But there is another class of passages, equally plain and necessary for us to receive at their face value and be duly influenced by them: passages which emphasize the Christian's accountability, which inculcate the discharge of his responsibility, and which blame him when he fails therein: passages which show that God deals with His people as rational creatures, setting before them their duty and requiring them under pain of His displeasure and their great loss to diligently perform the same. He expressly exhorts them to "grow in grace" (2 Peter 3:18). He bids them to "lay aside" the things which hinder and to desire the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:1, 2). So far from holding the Hebrews as being without excuse for not having grown, He blames them (5:11-14). Though He has promised to do good unto his people, nevertheless the Lord has declared "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them" (Ezek. 36:37), and hesitates not to say "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 3:2). At first sight it may appear impossible for us to show the meeting-point between the operations of God's sovereignty and the discharge of Christian responsibility, and to define the relation of the latter to the former and the manner of their interworking. Had we been left to ourselves, it had indeed been a task beyond the compass of human reason; but Scripture solves the problem for us, and in terms so plain that the simplest believer has no difficulty in understanding them. "By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). It is true that the apostle was treating more immediately with his ministerial career, yet in its wider application it is obvious that the principles of the verse apply with equal propriety and force to the practical side of the Christian's life—evidenced by the Lord's people in all ages appropriating to themselves its first and last clauses: but equally important and pertinent is that which comes in between them. In some passages "the grace of God" signifies His eternal good will unto His people; in others it connotes rather the effect of His favor, the "grace" which He bestows upon and infuses into them, as in "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). Christ is "full of grace and truth . . . and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:14, 16). Just as sin is a powerful principle working within the natural man, inclining him to evil, so at regeneration God's elect have communicated to their souls Divine grace, which acts as a powerful principle working within them and inclining unto holiness. "Grace is nothing else but an

introduction of the virtues of God into the soul" (T. Manton). That principle of grace which is imparted to us at the new birth is what is often termed "the new nature" in the Christian, and is designated "the spirit" because born of the Spirit" (John 3:6); and being spiritual and holy it is opposed by indwelling sin—called "the flesh" (Gal. 5:17)—and that in turn opposes the workings of sin or the lusts of the flesh, the one being contrary to the other. The principle of grace or new nature which is bestowed on the saint is but a creature, and though intrinsically holy it is entirely dependent upon its Author for strength and growth. And thus we must distinguish between the principle of grace and fresh supplies of grace for its invigoration and development. We may liken the newly-born babe and the young Christian subsequently to a fully-rigged yacht: though its sails be set, it is incapable of movement until a wind blows. The Christian is responsible to spread his sails and look to God for a breeze from Heaven, but until the wind stirs (John 3:8) he will make no progress. To drop the figure and come to the reality, what has just been said receives illustration in the apostolic benediction, wherein Paul so uniformly prayed for the saints, "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"; or as Peter expresses it "grace and peace be multiplied unto you," for nothing less than grace "multiplied" will enable any Christian to grow and thrive. We must distinguish then not only between the eternal good will and favor of God to His people (Eph. 1:4, 5) and the effect or fruit of it in the actual infusion of His grace (Eph. 4:7) or bestowal of an active principle of holiness, but we must also recognize the difference between that principle and the daily renewing of it (2 Cor. 4:16) or energizings of it by the influences of the Holy Spirit, which we deserve not. Though that new nature be a spiritual and holy one which disposes its possessor unto the pleasing of God, yet it has no sufficiency in itself to produce the fruits of holiness. Said the Psalmist "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes" (119:5): such a desire proceeded from the principle of grace, but having not the power in itself it needed additional Divine enablement to carry it out. So again "Quicken thou me according to thy word" (v. 25): the sparks of grace tinder the ashes of the flesh needed fanning into a blaze. The life of grace can only be carried on by complete dependence upon God and receiving from Him a fresh "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). "Ye must depend upon Christ for strength, ability to repent: all evangelical duties are done in His strength. Christ must give us soft hearts, hearts that are repentant; and must teach them by His Spirit before they will repent. Except He smite these rocks, they will yield no water, no tears for sin; except He break these hearts, they will not bleed. We may as well melt a flint or turn a stone into flesh as repent in our own strength. It is far above the power of nature, nay most contrary to it. How can we hate sin which naturally we love above all? mourn for that wherein we most delight? forsake that which is as dear as ourselves? It is the almighty power of Christ which only can do this: we must rely on, seek to Him, for it—Lam. 5:21" (David Clarkson, 1670). The same applies just as truly to faith, hope, love, patience—the exercise of any and all of the Christian graces. Only as we are strengthened with might by the Spirit in our inner man are we enabled to be fruitful branches of the Vine. In its final analysis the spiritual growth of the Christian turns upon the grace which he continues to receive from God, nor is the measure obtained determined by anything in or of us. Since it be grace, its Author dispenses it according to His own sovereign determination: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). It is God "that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7): to some an increase of faith and wisdom, to others of love and meekness, to yet others of comfort and peace, to yet others strength and victory—"dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11). Our concern and co-operation is equally due to enabling grace, for of ourselves we are riot sufficient to think anything as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Con. 3:5). All that is good in us is but a stream from the fountain of Divine grace, and naught but an abiding conviction of that fact will keep us both humble and thankful. God it is who inclines the mind and will unto any good, who illumines our understandings and draws out our affections unto things above. Even the means of grace are ineffectual unless God blesses

them to us; yet we sin if we use then, not. But let us turn nosy to the human—accountability-side of this subject: we are required to "grow in grace" (2 Peter 3:18), it is our responsibility to obtain "more grace" (James 4:6) and the fault is entirely ours if we do not, for "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) is infinitely more willing to give than we are to receive. We are plainly exhorted "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7)—where the reference is to our obtaining fresh supplies of grace. No fatalistic apathy is inculcated there: no sitting still with our hands folded until God "be pleased to revive us. No, the very opposite: a definite "asking," an earnest "seeking," an importunate "knocking," until the needed supply is obtained. We are expressly bidden to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). We are freely invited "to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16)—pardoning grace, sanctifying grace, persevering grace, as well as grace to faithfully perform the common tasks of life. It is then both our privilege and duty to obtain fresh supplies of grace each day. Says the apostle "let us have grace (Heb. 12:28). But let us note the whole of that verse and observe the five things in it. "Wherefore [an inference drawn from the context] we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [the privilege conferred upon us], let us have grace [the enablement] whereby we may serve God acceptably [the task assigned us] with reverence and godly fear"—the manner of its performance. Such a duty as serving God acceptably we cannot possibly perform without special Divine assistance. That assistance or strength is to be definitely, diligently, constantly sought by us. To quote from John Owen on this verse—who is one of the very last to be accused of having a legalistic spirit: "to have an increase of this grace as unto its degrees and measures and to keep in exercise in all the duties of the service of God, is a duty required of believers by virtue of all the Gospel privileges which they receive from God. For herein consists that revenue of glory which on their account He expecteth and requireth." Alas that so many hyper-Calvinists have got so far away from that holy balance. In order to the obtaining fresh supplies of grace we need, first, to cultivate a sense of our own weakness, sinfulness, and insufficiency, fighting against every uprising of pride and self-confidence. Second, we need to be more diligent in using the grace we already have, remembering that the one who traded with his talents was he to whom additional ones were entrusted. Third, we need to supplicate God for the same: since Christ has taught us to ask our Father for our daily bread, how much more do we need to ask Him for daily grace. There is a mediatorial fulness of grace in Christ for His people, and it is their privilege and duty to draw upon Him for the same. "Let us therefore come boldly [freely and confidently] unto the throne of grace": the verb is not in the aorist but the present tense, signifying a continuous coming—form the habit of so doing. It is both our privilege and duty to come, and to come "boldly." The apostle did not say none may come except they do so confidently: rather is he showing (from considerations in the context) how we should come. If we cannot come with boldness, then let us come asking for it. We can advance nothing but the most idle and worthless excuses for our non-compliance with the blessed invitation of Hebrews 4:16 and our failure to "find grace to help in time of need," yea, so pointless and vain are those excuses it would be a waste of time to name and refute them. If we traced them back to their source, little as we may suspect it, it would be found that those excuses issue from a sense of self-sufficiency, as is clearly implied by those words "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). God says to me, to you, let him take hold of my strength" (Isa. 27:5); and again, "seek the Lord and his strength" (1 Chron. 16:11). Therefore we should come before Him with the prayer "Now therefore O God strengthen my heart" (Neh. 6:9), pleading His promise "I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee" (Isa. 41:10). In an earlier paragraph we quoted the words "thy God hath commanded thy strength," yet so far from the Psalmist feeling that relieved him of all responsibility in the matter, he cried "strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us" (68:28). And now let us show how that I Corinthians 15:10 reveals the meeting point between the Divine operations of

grace and our improvement of the same. First, "by the grace of God I am what I am"—a brand plucked out of the fire, a new creature in Christ Jesus. Second, "and the grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain (contrast 2 Cor. 6:1), but I labored more abundantly than they all": so far from grace encouraging unto listlessness, it stirred up to earnest endeavor and the improving of the same, so that the apostle was conscious of and shrank not from affirming his own diligence and zeal, Third, "yet not I but the grace of God which was with me": he disowns any credit to himself, but gives all the glory to God. It is our bounden duty to use the grace God has bestowed upon us, stirring up and exercising that holy principle, yet this is not to puff us up. As the apostle said again, "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1:29)—he took no praise unto himself, but humbly ascribed what he had done entirely unto the Lord. Fourth, thus grace is given the Christian to make use of, to labor with—in striving against sin, resisting the Devil, running in the way of God's commandments; yet in so laboring, lie must be mindful of the Source of his spiritual energy. We can only work out what God has wrought in us (Phil. 2:12, 13), but remember it is our duty to "work out." Not only is it the Christian's responsibility to seek and obtain more grace for himself, but it is also his duty to stimulate and increase the grace of his brethren. Re-read that sentence and let it startle you out of your lethargy and self-complacency. It is of no avail to reply, I cannot increase my own stock of grace, let alone that of another. Scripture is plain on this point: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29)—note well that verse is addressed not specially to the ministers of the gospel, but the rank and file of God's people. Yes, you may, you ought to be a helper, a strengthener, a builder up of your fellow saints. Crumbling about your lot, groaning over your state, will not be any stimulus to them: rather will it depress and foster unbelief. But if you speak of the faithfulness of God, bear to testimony to sufficiency of Christ, recount his goodness and mercy to you, quote His promises, then will your hearers experience the truth of that proverb "Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (27:17). II

It has often been said that "Everything depends upon a right beginning." There is considerable force in that adage: if the foundation be faulty, the superstructure is certain to be insecure; if we take the wrong turn when starting out on a journey, the desired destination will not be reached—unless the error be corrected. It is indeed of vital importance for the professing Christian, to measure himself by the unerring standard of God's Word and make sure that his conversion was a sound one, and that his house is being built upon the rock and not upon the sand. Multitudes are deceived, fatally deceived at this vital point: "there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12). Therefore are God's children expressly bidden "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5). Nor is that to be done in any half-hearted way: "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10) is our bounden duty. "Prove all things": take nothing for granted, give not yourself the benefit of any doubt, but verify your profession and certify your conversion, rest not satisfied until you have clear and reliable evidence that you are indeed a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then heed the exhortation that follows: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). That is no needless caution, but one which it is incumbent upon us to take to heart. There is that still within you which is opposed to the truth, yea, which loves a lie. Moreover, you will encounter fierce opposition from without and be tempted to forsake the stand you have taken. More subtle still will be the evil example of lax professors, who still laugh at your strictness and seek to drag you down to their level. For these and other reasons "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time ye should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1)—the "at any time" intimates we must constantly be out our guard against such a calamity. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he us faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23), and therefore we should be faithful in performing. See to it that you

hide not your light under a bushel. Be not ashamed of your Christian uniform, but wear it on all occasions. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works. Be not a compromiser and temporizer, but out and out for Christ. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast" (Rev. 3:3) If your conversion was a saving one you received that which was infinitely more precious than silver and gold: then prize it as such and cling tenaciously to it. Hold fast the things of God in your memory by frequent meditation thereon, keep them warm in your affections and inviolate in your conscience. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). If you have by grace bought the truth, see to it that you "sell it not" (Prov. 23:23): be unflinching in your maintenance of it and unswerving in your devotedness to Christ and what He has entrusted to you. Thus it is not only necessary that we begin aright, but it is equally essential that we continue right: "If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). A persevering attendance on Christ's instructions is the best proof of the reality of our profession. Only by a steady faith in the person and work of Christ, a firm reliance on His promises, and regular obedience to His precepts—notwithstanding all opposition from the flesh, the world, and the Devil—do we approve ourselves to be His genuine disciples. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love" (John 15:9)—continue in the believing enjoyment of it. And how is that to be accomplished? Why, by refraining from those things which would grieve that love, by doing those things which conduce to a fuller manifestation thereof. Nor is such counsel in the least degree "legalistic," as our Lord's very next words show: "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" (v. 10). It is perfectly true that if a soul has been regenerated by the Spirit of God that he will "hold on his way," yet it is equally true that holding our way is the evidence or proof of our regeneration, and that if we do not so, then we only deceive ourselves if we suppose we are regenerated. The fact that God has promised to "perform" or "complete" the good work which He has begun in any of His people does not render it needless for them to perform and complete the work which He has assigned them. Not so did the apostles think or act. Paul and Barnabas spake to their followers "persuading them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43), which we understand to signify that they exhorted them not to be discouraged by the opposition they meet with from the ungodly, nor allow the ragings of indwelling sin to becloud their apprehension of the Divine favor, but rather to go on counting upon the superabounding of God's grace and for them to more and more prove its sufficiency. So too we find those same apostles going on to other places "Confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them, to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Very far were they from believing in the mechanical idea of "once saved, always saved," which is now so rife. They insisted on the needs-be for the discharge of the Christian's responsibility and were faithful in warning him of both the difficulties and perils of the path he must steadfastly pursue if he was to enter Heaven. Yea, they hesitated not to say unto the saints that they would be presented unblameable and unreprouable in God's sight "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23). So too they exhorted them "Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2)—watch against disinclination to prayer, be not discouraged if the answer be delayed, be persistent and importunate, be thankful for past and present mercies and expectant of future ones. The Christian then is to continue along the same lines as he began. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6). Observe well where the emphasis is placed: it is not "Christ Jesus the Saviour" or "Redeemer" but "Christ Jesus the Lord." In order to receive Christ Jesus as "the Lord" it was necessary for you to forsake all that was opposed to him (Isa. 55:7); continue thus and "not turn again to folly" (Ps. 85:8). It was required that you throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and be reconciled to Him: then take them not up again, and "keep thyself from idols" (1 John 5:20). It was by surrendering yourself to His righteous claims

and giving to Him the throne of your heart: then suffer not "other lords to have dominion over you" (Isa. 26:13), but "yield yourself unto God as one that is alive from the dead" (Rom. 6:13). As Romaine pointed out, "He must be received always as He was received once." There is no change of Object and there must be no change in us. Be willing, yea glad for Him to rule over you. But let us take note now of another word in that important verse: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." Here, as in so many passages in the Epistles, the Christian life is likened unto a "walk," which denotes action, movement in a forward direction. We are not only required to "hold fast" what we have and to "continue" as we began, but we must advance and make steady progress. The "narrow way" has to be traversed if Life is to be entered into. There has to be a forgetting of those things which are behind (no complacent contentment with any previous attainment) and a "reaching forth unto those things which are before," pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14, 15). There the figure passes from walking to running—which is more strenuous and exacting. In Hebrews 12:1, 2 the Christian life is likened unto a race, and in I Corinthians 9:24 we are reminded "they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize," to which is added "so run that ye may obtain." In discussing the promotion of spiritual growth we have dwelt only on general principles; in those which immediately follow on the means of growth, we shall enter more into detail; but before turning to them let us connect what has been pointed out in the above paragraphs with what we emphasized earlier in this chapter. There we said that "in the final analysis the spiritual growth of a Christian depends upon the grace which he continues to receive from God." Now it should at once be apparent to any renewed soul that while it is obviously his duty to hold fast what he has received from God, to continue in the path of holiness, yea to go forward therein, yet he will only be enabled to discharge those duties as he receives further supplies of strength and wisdom from above. Therefore it is recorded for his encouragement, "God giveth more grace . . . giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6), and the "humble" are those who feel their need, who are emptied of self-confidence and self-complacency, who come as beggars to receive favors. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you" (2 Peter 1:2). In connection with the apostolic salutations it needs to be borne in mind, first, they were very much more than pious forms of greeting, they were definite prayers on behalf of those to whom their Epistles were addressed. Second, since such prayers were immediately and verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, they most certainly contained requests for those things which were "according to" the Divine will. Third, in supplicating God for what they did, the apostles set before their readers an example, teaching them what they most needed and what they should especially ask for. Fourth, thus Christians today have a sure index for their guidance and should be at no loss to decide whether they are warranted in praying for such and such a spiritual blessing. Believers today may be fully assured that it is both their privilege and duty to seek from God not only an increase, but also a multiplication of the grace which he has already bestowed upon them. The need for increased grace is real and imperative. An active nature such as man's must either grow worse or better, and therefore we should be as deeply concerned about the increase of grace as we should be cautious against the loss of grace. The Christian life is a pulling against the current of the flesh within and the world without, and they who row against the stream must needs ply their oars vigorously and continuously, or the force of the waters will carry them backward. If a man be toiling up a sandy hill, he will sink down if he does not go forward: and unless the Christian's affections be increasingly set upon objects above, then they will soon be immersed in the things of time and sense. Very solemn and searching is that warning of our Lord's: the man who did not improve his talent lost it (Matthew 25:28)—many a Christian who once had zeal in the Lord's service and much joy in his soul, have them no more. Yet still more solemn is it to note that the call of "Let us go on unto perfection" is at once followed by a description of the state and doom of apostates (Heb. 6:1, 4). As Manton pointed out, "It is an ill sign to be contented with a little grace. He was never good that doth not

desire to grow better. Spiritual things do not cloy in the enjoyment. He that hath once tasted the sweetness of grace hath arguments enough to make him seek further grace: every degree of holiness is as desirable as the first, therefore there can be no true holiness without a desire of perfect holiness. God giveth us a taste to this end and purpose that we may long for a fuller draught." Yet He does not force the further draught upon us, but often tests us to see if such is really wanted by us—as Christ after communing with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and making their hearts "burn within them" while He talked with them in the way, then "made as though He would have gone further" when they arrived at their destination; but they "constrained him, saying, Abide with us" (Luke 24:28-32). The grapes of Eshcol were a sample of what Canaan produced and fired the zeal of Joshua and Caleb to go up and possess that land; but their unbelieving brethren were content with the sample—and never obtained anything more! In the outward part of the Christian life there may be too much, but not so in the inward. There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge, a restless energy of the flesh which spurs to activities which Scripture nowhere enjoins, but such, works as those are termed "will worship" (Col. 2:22) and are often dictated by mere tradition or superstition, or are simply the imitation of what other "church members" engage in. But there cannot be too much faith in God, too much of His Holy fear upon us, too much knowledge of spiritual things, too much denying of self and devotion to Christ, nor too much love for our fellow saints. For all such virtues we need "abundant grace." There are some who are far from the kingdom of God, having no deep concern for their souls (Eph. 2:13) . There are others who come near to the kingdom of God (Mark 12:34), yet never enter into it (Acts 26:18). There are some who enter but who make little progress and are poor testimonials to Christ. But there are a few of whom it is said, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom" (2 Peter 1:11), and as the context shows, they are the ones who "give diligence"—putting their soul's interests before everything else. Those who improve the grace given thereby make room for more (Luke 8:18) and ensure for themselves a more ample reward in the day to come. We fully concur with Manton that "According to our measures of grace, so will our measures of glory be, for they that have most grace are vessels of a larger capacity—others are filled according to their size." We know there was not full agreement among the Puritans on this point, though we could quote from others, of them who held there will be degrees of glory among the saints in Heaven, as there will be differences of punishment among the lost in Hell. And why not? There are considerable diversities among the angels on high (Eph. 1:21, etc.). It cannot be gainsaid that God dispenses the gifts and graces of His Spirit unequally among His people on earth. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God will suit our rewards according to our services, and our crowns according to the improvement we have made of His grace and of our opportunities and privileges. The reaping will be in proportion to the sowing (2 Cor. 9:6, Gal. 6:8). True, every crown will be cast at the feet of Christ, but the crowns will not be in all respects alike. Labor, then, to get more grace and improve the same. Thus there is abundant reason why the child of God should not only seek for more grace, but that grace may be "multiplied" unto him. If an earthly monarch should invite one of his subjects to ask a favor of him, he would not feel himself flattered if only some trifling thing were requested. Nor do we honor the Sovereign of Heaven by making petty requests—"We are coming to a King; large petitions let us bring." Does He not bid us "open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10): think you that He means not what He says? Does He not invite us "drink, yea drink abundantly [from the fountain of grace], O beloved" (Song of Sol. 5:1): then, why not take Him at His word? He is "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) and has revealed to us "the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7), yea, "the exceeding riches of his grace" (Eph. 2:7): and for whom are they available, if not for those who feel their deep need of and trustfully seek them? "God is able to make all grace abound toward you" (2 Cor. 9:8) and He would not have told us this if He was not also willing to do so. And now let us anticipate an objection, which might be expressed thus: I realize that spiritual growth is entirely

dependent on receiving fresh supplies of grace from God, and that it is my responsibility and duty to diligently and confidently seek the same. I have done so, yet instead of grace having been "multiplied" to me, my stock has diminished: so far from having progressed, I have gone backward; instead of my iniquities being "subdued" (Micah 7:19), my lusts rage more fiercely than ever. Several replies may be made. First, you may not have sought as earnestly as you should. Asking and seeking are not sufficient: there has to be an insistent "knocking" (Matthew 7:7), a holy striving with God (Rom. 15:30), a saying with Jacob, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Second, God's time to grant your request may not have arrived: "therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you" (Isa. 30:18)—He waits to test your faith, and because He requires persistence and importunity from us. What is hard to obtain is valued more highly than that which comes easily. Third, it is to be born in mind that the infusion of grace into a soul promptly evokes the enmity of the flesh, and the more grace be given us the more will sin resist it. Very soon after Christ came into the world Herod stirred up all the country against Him, seeking to slay Him; and when Christ enters a soul the whole of indwelling sin is stirred against Him, for He has come there as its Enemy. The more grace we have the more conscious are we of our corruptions, and the more we are occupied with them the less conscious are we of our grace. As grace is increased so too is our sense of need. Fourth, God does not always answer in kind. You have asked for increased holiness, and been answered with more light; for the removal of a burden, and been given more strength to carry it. You have sought for victory over your lusts, and have been given humbling grace so that you loath yourself more deeply. You have besought the Lord to take away some "thorn in the flesh," and He has answered by giving you grace to bear it.

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