

Growth in Grace

by Daniel Steele

Growth in grace reveals and magnifies remaining inward corruption, but the complete eradication of inbred sin is by the direct energy of the Sanctifier through faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: John 14:21, Romans 7:18, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Sanctification", "Christian Growth"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the importance of growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that true Christian growth starts with grace and then leads to knowledge, highlighting that we come to know Jesus through love and intimacy, not just intellectual understanding. Steele discusses the ongoing battle with original sin even after conversion, pointing out that self-abhorrence and self-condemnation are often seen as signs of true piety. He delves into the concept of entire sanctification, where believers experience a complete eradication of inbred sin through the power of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the need for a specific act of faith to cleanse from all inward tendencies to sin.

Transcript

We are exhorted to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Some tell us that we find the true philosophy of Christian growth by reversing this order, and putting the knowledge of Christ first, as the means of increasing in grace. But the order of the apostle -- grace first and knowledge seconds -- is the most philosophical. We grow in the knowledge of Christ through the heart, and not through the head. We do not know Jesus till we love him, and the more we love the more intimate our knowledge of him. The more we familiarize ourselves with the perfect character of Jesus, the more we shall admire him, just as by studying the works of Angelo we come to admire him the more. But admiration is not love. It kindles no furnace-glow in the affections; it impels the soul onward through no losses and labors, self-denials and persecutions, to the martyr's stake. As the character of Christ folds its splendors beneath the long and earnest gaze of the student, he may be growing esthetically by familiarity with so many moral beauties, and he may become more perfectly grounded in his theological beliefs respecting the Divinity of the man of Nazareth, and yet he may, in his own heart, be refusing to receive and enthrone him as his rightful king.

We advance a step further, and say that growth in grace, while accompanied by increasing power to abstain from actual sin, has no power to annihilate the spirit of sin, commonly called original sin. The revelation of its indwelling is more and more perfect and appalling as we advance from conversion. Hence, in Calvinistic writings especially, we find that the measure of true piety is self-abhorrence. The more entire

the consecration, the more vile in their own eyes do eminent saints appear. This standard of piety is a peculiarity of all the truly devout souls who were taught to believe that there is no power to deliver from inborn depravity this side of the grave. To these persons a piety which is not self-loathing and self-condemning is as contradictory as a piety which is not penitent. But the sinless Jesus exhibited the marvelous proof of an impenitent piety. May not they who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb stand forth, even on earth, as specimens of a piety which glorifies God without self-vilification? Does God get the highest revenue of glory from us while we perpetually proclaim that the blood of Christ fails to reach the root of evil in our natures? If not, then the self-loathing style of piety, like that of David Brainerd in his early ministry, who saw so much corruption in his heart that he wondered the people did not stone him out of the pulpit, is a mere initial and rudimentary form, reflecting not the highest honor upon its Author.

But the fact remains undisputed, that in all Christian experience, whether under Calvinian or Arminian doctrines, growth in grace reveals and magnifies that remaining inward corruption which it has no power entirely to remove. In the advanced yet not entirely sanctified believer, the spiritual perception is keener, the sensibility to sin more delicate, and hence more painful. It is the experience of the Christian world through all ages that the converted soul never outgrows this taint in its texture and substance. So strong is the belief of the Church on this point that many have asserted that the cure of the spirit of sin is impossible in this life. On the other hand we have the testimony of thousands, that by faith in the all-cleansing blood of Jesus Christ they were instantaneously, completely, and permanently delivered from all those inward proclivities toward sin which formerly gave them so much pain, so that they can endorse the testimony of the now translated Cookman two years before he "swept through the gates," -- "I, Alfred Cookman, am washed in the blood of the Lamb." Here are two classes of witnesses -- the whole body of imperfect believers, attesting the presence of inward corruption which they do not completely outgrow, and a goodly number in full trust in Christ, affirming with lip and life that they were instantaneously delivered from "the body of this death." Both classes witness to the same truth -- depraved inclination in the justified soul is not outgrown by spiritual development, but killed by the power of the Holy Ghost through a specific act of faith. But this spiritual development by growth is the necessary preparation for the destruction of inborn sin. The power of the Holy Spirit is exerted only through faith, and this faith is possible only when we are conscious of a need of cleansing from all inward tendencies to sin. This consciousness is awakened by the increasing cleanness of our spiritual perceptions under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As Dr. Tyng says, "There is no calendar containing the length of time necessary for the conversion of the sinner," so there is no limit in time for this preparation for the work of entire sanctification. It may be an hour after regeneration, or the soul may be so slow in apprehending its privileges in Christ Jesus that years and decades may roll by before "faith grasps the blessings she desires."

We do not deny that incipient believers may, and do, in their gradual spiritual unfolding, mortify and diminish the remains of sin lingering in them after justification. What we affirm is, that the complete eradication of inbred sin after this period of decay is by the direct energy of the Sanctifier, whose interposition is specially invoked. This is his great office in the economy of salvation. His glory he will not give to another. "The Lord God is a jealous God." The Spirit of Truth will not let growth or development usurp his function and wear his honors. Hence the moment of entire sanctification is usually attended by an unmistakable demonstration of the power of the Holy Ghost, marking it as the most marvelous and memorable event in the soul's history this side of glory. We do not deny that there may be successive operations of the Holy Spirit, or baptisms culminating in the grand finale -- the extinction of sin and the fullness of God.

Says Rev. J. Fletcher:

Should you ask how many baptisms or effusions of the sanctifying Spirit are necessary to cleanse a believer from all sin, and to kindle his soul into perfect love, I reply, that the effect of a sanctifying truth depends upon the order of the faith with which that truth is embraced, and upon the power of the Spirit with which it is applied. I should betray a want of modesty if I brought the operations of the Holy Ghost and the energy of faith under a rule which is not expressly laid down in the Scriptures. If one powerful baptism of the Spirit 'seal you unto the day of redemption, and cleanse you from all [moral] filthiness,' so much the better. If two or more be necessary, the Lord can repeat them.

I may, however, venture to say, in general, that before we can rank among perfect Christians we must receive so much of the truth and Spirit of Christ by faith as to have the pure love of God and man shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us, and to be filled with the meek and lowly mind which was in Christ. And if one outpouring of the Spirit -- one bright manifestation of the sanctifying truth -- so empties us of self as to fill us with the mind of Christ and with pure love, we are undoubtedly Christians in the full sense of the word.

Says Mr. Wesley:

The generality of those who are justified feel in themselves more or less pride, anger, self-will, and a heart bent to backsliding. And till they have gradually mortified these, they are not fully renewed in love. God usually gives a considerable time for men to receive light, to grow in grace, to do and to suffer his will before they are either justified or sanctified. But he does not invariably adhere to this. Sometimes he 'cuts short the work.' He does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies or sanctifies both those who have done or suffered nothing, and those who have not had time for a gradual growth either in light or grace. God may, with man's good leave, do the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in a great many instances. And yet there is a gradual work before and after that moment. So that one may affirm that the work is gradual, another that it is instantaneous, without any manner of contradiction.

The entire sanctification of all persevering believers before death, without a conscious act of faith, is hinted at in the above quotation. The grounds of our faith in this particular are the Divine promises unto those who are in covenant relations with God. He stands pledged to the persevering believer to bestow upon him eternal life: "This promise involves all the qualifications requisite to admission to a holy heaven. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perfect (Greek) it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:6.

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