

Christian Growth

by Roger Ellsworth

Christian growth is a natural desire for every Christian, and it comes about as we diligently use the means that God has appointed.

Duration: 31:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:25, John 3:3, Hebrews 2:16, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor discusses the desire for growth in the Christian faith. He emphasizes that believers are not saved to simply consume religious teachings, but to serve and advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. He encourages those who may not be able to be as active in church ministry to devote more time to prayer. The pastor also compares physical birth to spiritual birth, highlighting the manifestation of new life in a believer's actions and lifestyle. He concludes by acknowledging the vastness and incomprehensibility of salvation, stating that even with unlimited time and resources, it would be impossible to fully grasp its glory and wonder.

Transcript

Please find again 1 Peter chapter 1, 1 Peter chapter 1, and we continue today looking at this theme that has occupied us on these summer Sunday mornings. I'm talking about the theme Guidance in Practical Spirituality, Guidance in Practical Spirituality. And another way of putting it is that we are looking into the Word of God to try to find help with this awesome matter of Christian living.

That's what practical spirituality comes down to, living the Christian life. And I've been saying all along that in order for us to live the Christian life, we have to be Christians. You can't live the Christian life if you're not a Christian.

So I thought it necessary for us to revisit the grand and glorious doctrine of salvation. And we've spent the last several Sundays looking at this matter of salvation. And we have not done justice to that topic.

My, it would be impossible to do justice to the topic of salvation. The Bible tells us that the angels of heaven desire to look into these things. You and I, if we're saved, are blessed with something that the angels themselves envy.

And so something that glorious, something that wonderful cannot be covered in just the space of a few messages. If I had a thousand years to preach and a thousand tongues with which to preach, I would not at the end of that period of time have done justice to this wonderful thing of salvation. You may be saying, well now, Pastor, you're kind of giving in to exaggeration, aren't you? And I will say to you that I am not exaggerating at all.

If you think that, it's because you have not yet understood in anywhere near an adequate measure how glorious, how wonderful, how astonishing is this thing of salvation. But today we come to a different emphasis. Today we turn a corner in this series.

And I'm not going to be dealing now with the matter of salvation. I'm going to be dealing with things that come after salvation. And I'm concerned today about this matter that the Apostle Peter mentions here in these verses that I read a while ago.

There you see it in chapter 2 and verse 2. He says, as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby. And this is what we're interested in, is this matter of Christian growth, Christian growth. And if you'll turn over just a few pages to 2 Peter chapter 3, you will find there in verse 18, 2 Peter chapter 3 in verse 18, the Apostle Peter saying, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. And so I say to you that it's obvious that the Apostle Peter was interested in this thing of Christian growth.

If you go back to 2 Peter chapter 1, you will find him talking about this matter of growth. There in verse 5 of 2 Peter chapter 1, he says, for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge, self-control, to self-control, perseverance, to perseverance, godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. And I say to you that even though he doesn't use the word grow in those verses of scripture, that that's obviously what he's talking about.

He's talking about the matter of Christian growth. And so this is the topic that we have before us today. And I say that this is the natural consideration for us after having visited the doctrine of salvation.

The next thing for us to talk about is Christian growth. Now, I want to divide the message this morning for you into three parts. I want you to think with me, first of all, about the desire for growth, the desire for growth.

And then secondly, the areas of growth. And then thirdly, we'll talk about the means of growth, the means of growth. So those are the three things that we have here before us today.

The desire for growth, the areas of growth, and the means of growth. Now, think with me about this first point, which is the desire for growth. I may surprise some of you at this point, because I want to say to you very emphatically that everyone who is saved has a desire, has a desire to grow.

Everyone who is saved has a desire to grow in the things of God. Everyone who is saved has a desire to grow spiritually. I will say to you that this is quite inevitable.

You say to me, well, Pastor, yes, I'm a Christian, but no, I don't have any interest in growing in my Christian life. I don't have any interest in growing spiritually. I will not hesitate to say to you there's something that is drastically wrong here.

Something's drastically wrong. You have not gotten plugged into this Christianity thing in the proper way. Every Christian has a desire to grow.

Now, you may be saying, well, I think that you're going to have to offer me some evidence for that, and I am prepared to do that. Have you ever noticed how often the Bible likens this matter of being saved, of becoming a Christian, to being born spiritually, being born into the family of God? You recall, don't you, that over there in John chapter 3, Jesus met Nicodemus at night. This was the first instance, I guess, the first episode of Nick at Night.

He met Nicodemus at night. Just trying to make sure that you all are still with me. Nicodemus came to him and said, Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do the miracles that you're doing unless God be with him.

And the Lord Jesus just took Nicodemus right to the central issue. He said, I say to you, Nicodemus, that unless you are born again, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. And so that is the most prominent passage, I think, on this matter of being born again.

And there, Jesus likens salvation to being born again. Salvation to this thing of being spiritually born. He essentially says to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, just as you were born physically, and now because you've been born physically, you have entered upon this physical life, you have got to be born spiritually.

You've got to be born with a birth from above. You've got to be born from heaven above in order to enter in upon true spiritual life. And you find the Bible using this terminology quite often.

Why it's right here in 1 Peter chapter 1. I wonder if you noticed it a while ago when we read these verses. There it is in verse 23 of 1 Peter chapter 1. Peter says, having been born again. Born again.

To be saved is to be born again. It's to have a spiritual birth from heaven itself. Sometimes you hear people refer to, they'll use the terminology like this, they'll say, well, I'm a born again Christian.

Well, that's really redundant. To be born again is to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to be born again.

And so when you call yourself a born again Christian, you might as well say I'm a Christian Christian. You're just repeating yourself. You see, to be, I say it again, to be born again is to be a Christian.

To be a Christian is to be born again. Now think with me about this matter of physical birth for a moment. When we have children come along, we immediately see signs of life, don't we? And life manifests itself.

I was talking with you about this some time ago when Sylvia and I embarked upon the wonderful sea of parenting. I mean, it made a radical change in our lives. We began doing things differently than we had done them before.

When Tim came along, we immediately knew that there was a new life there in our home because that life manifested itself. And it manifested itself in lots of ways. And the most distasteful way, I should say, would be was when it manifested itself at one or two or three in the morning.

Well, all of you who are parents know about this part of parenting. We would have been tremendously alarmed if we had brought that baby boy home from the hospital and there had been no manifestations of life. And he began to grow.

He began to grow. Now just as that was true in the physical realm, so it's true in the spiritual realm. You cannot tell me that you have life from God and then go on to say, but there aren't any manifestations of that life.

I have life from God, but no, there's no growth. There's no interest in growth. Have you ever noticed how every child wants to grow? Every child wants to grow.

Sometimes I've heard Sylvia say to our grandchildren, I don't want you to grow. I want you just to stay the same size that you are right now. Well, you can understand why a grandmother would say that when grandchild is particularly sweet and cuddly at a certain stage.

And every time, without exception, when grandma says to one of the grandchildren, I don't think I'm going to let you get any older. I don't think I'm going to let you grow anymore. I want to keep you just the way you are.

Without exception, the response has been, no, no. Children want to grow. They don't want to stay the same size.

Now, I tell you that every child of God has planted in him a seed of life, a seed of life. Every child of God has been born spiritually. Every child of God has received life from above.

And just as physical life manifests itself, and just as there is a desire in the physical realm to grow, so if you have had life from above, if you receive life from above, there is going to be a manifestation of that life, and there is going to be a desire in your life to grow spiritually. Tell me you have no desire to grow spiritually? And I have to tell you on the authority of this book that I have in front of me that you have no life in you. The desire for growth comes from having that spiritual life.

God plants a seed of life in us when we are born again, when we're saved. And that seed of life makes us desire to grow spiritually. Now, I will admit that all Christians do not grow to the same degree.

Why look at us physically here? We don't all grow to the same degree physically, do we? And so it is in the spiritual realm. We don't all grow to the same degree spiritually, but we all grow to some degree, all grow to some degree. And we all have a desire to grow in spiritual things.

Now, with that as our starting point, let's go here to the second thing, which I have already announced, and that is the areas of growth. In what ways do Christians desire to grow anyway? Well, one area of growth is in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Did you notice this a while ago in 2 Peter 3, where Peter said grow in the knowledge? He's just, he's offering a command here.

He's saying grow. You make sure you grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. A Christian is one who confesses freely, gladly, that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

He gladly confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one of God. Now, if you ever have any adequate understanding of who Jesus is, you'll have a desire to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. You won't be satisfied with just a little bit of knowledge about Jesus.

You'll want to go farther and farther. You'll want to increase in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. You'll find yourself saying that I want to, oh, I want to know him better.

I want to know him in a greater way. To know him is to love him, and to love him is to obey him. I tell you, my friends, it's vital that we grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus so that we can love him more and so we can obey him more completely.

And so this is one area of growth in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. But then we're also to grow in another area. We're to grow in grace.

This is also found in 2 Peter 3, in verse 18, where Peter says grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're to grow in the knowledge, but we're to grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus. I would put it to you like this.

I would say that there are certain graces in the Christian life, and you and I are to increasingly reflect those graces. We found Peter talking about this essentially there in 2 Peter 1. I read these to you a while ago. They're in verses 5 through 7, where he talks about graces that we are supposed to manifest.

And you go over into Galatians chapter 5, and you find Paul talking about the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, faith, meekness, temperance, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness. And this is the fruit of the Spirit. Now, no Christian manifests to the degree that he should the graces of the Christian life.

But every Christian, I say, will manifest these graces to some degree, and he will desire to manifest these graces to a larger degree. A Christian is not satisfied with what he has attained. A Christian wants to progress far enough in this Christian life.

I don't think there's any need for me to concern myself about progressing further. I've been a pastor for, lo, these many years, and I'm yet to meet a Christian who has said such a thing. No Christian has ever said to me, well, Pastor, I feel like I've progressed far enough now in the Christian life.

I don't want to progress any farther. No. A Christian wants to keep growing.

He wants to keep advancing. He wants to keep gaining ground in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and in the graces of the Holy Spirit. I can put this business of growing in grace to you in another way.

I can tell you that it essentially means that we resemble more and more the Lord Jesus Christ. This should be our desire, brothers and sisters in Christ, to resemble the Lord Jesus so that when people look at us, they will see a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then I would say that there's a third area in which we should grow, and that is the area of Christian duties, Christian duties.

The Lord has called us to work. My wife and I dad used to say that, I don't know how many times I heard him say this when I was growing up, but he said it enough that I never forgot it. He used to say, we're saved to serve, saved to serve.

Have you ever heard that? Saved to serve. Well, I think that that used to be rather common among Christian people. I don't think that, I think that many of you would not find that to be at all surprising to hear that phrase, saved to serve.

You're familiar with that. You've heard that for years. But I have concerns today that a lot of Christian people seem to think that they're saved to sit, saved to sit, and they don't want to do anything in the Christian life.

They don't want to do anything in the ministry of the church. I think a consumer mentality has gripped much of the church today. We go through the days of our weeks as consumers, and we want things done for us, done for us.

And then we come to church, and we don't shift gears. And first thing we know, we're sitting here as consumers. And we're here in the service, and we're essentially saying, now those folks on the platform better be doing things the way I want them done, or I'm going to let them know about it.

Well, my friend, that's all wrong. That's the wrong mentality to have. You are not saved to simply sit and consume religious marketing.

You are saved to serve yourself. And there's something you can be doing. There's something you can be doing to advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, some of you may be saying, well, Pastor, I certainly can't do what I used to do. Well, then do something else. Let me ask those of you who are not able to be as active in the ministry of the church as you were a few years ago.

Let me ask you to devote more of your time to prayer. More of your time to prayer. Do you pray for this church? Do you pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit upon this church? Do you pray for God to bless the ministry of this church in a remarkable way? I think many of us would be ashamed today if we were asked whether we have prayed recently for a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit in this church.

Do you pray for the preaching of the Word? Some of you may be saying, well, I really don't find much to like with that preacher and his preaching. Have you prayed for me? My preaching might get better if you'd pray for me. If I'm doing poor preaching, it may be your fault.

And so pray for the preaching of God's Word. I just remind you of what Charles Spurgeon, that giant of a preacher back in the late 1800s in London, used to say. You remember when Spurgeon went to London, he was just a teenager.

He went there to pastor this church, and he was 19 years of age. And the church was just in the doldrums. They were in terrible condition.

And Spurgeon went to that church, and he began to preach, and the building began to fill, and people began to get saved, and God did remarkable things. And when the church really began to explode with growth, people, of course, began to ask Spurgeon his secret. And he, I think, surprised them when he replied time after time to that question.

My people, pray for me. My people, pray for me. I can tell you what one pastor said.

He said, poor preaching is God's judgment on a prayerless church. Poor preaching is God's judgment on a prayerless church. Oh, my friends, we need to be praying for the ministry of this church, and that's service to God.

Are you growing in the area of Christian duties? You may not be able to do what you once did, but pray. And it may be that you should take up a ministry of encouraging your brothers and sisters in Christ by just writing notes and letters. It may be that you have an unbelieving family member or friend who could be reached.

If you would sit down and put down on paper an appeal to that person to come to Jesus and enclose a gospel tract. Now there's something that you can do to advance the kingdom of Christ if you want to do it. If you want to do it, there's something you can do.

And so I just urge you to be growing in knowledge of the Lord Jesus, growing in Christian graces, looking more and more like Jesus, and grow in Christian duties, doing more to advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Now in the time we have remaining, I want to just deal with this third point that I announced, and that is the means of growth. The means of growth.

And it may be by this time you are asking this question, what is necessary for me to grow as a Christian? Yes, I have this desire that you talked about, Pastor. You talked about how we are born with a birth from above. We're spiritually born, and when that takes place, God plants a seed of life in us, and that life manifests itself, and that life desires to grow.

And I have that. And yes, I understand the areas in which I'm to grow. I'm to grow in the knowledge of Christ, and in the graces of Christ, and in Christian duties.

But what is necessary now for me to grow in these areas? And my answer, and I ask you to pay careful attention to this, is Christian growth comes about as we diligently use the means that God has appointed. Christian growth comes about as we diligently use the means that God has appointed. God has appointed certain means to yield growth, certain means that will produce growth in our lives.

And we have to use these means. And we not only have to use these means, but we have to use them diligently. Diligently.

Now you understand that word diligently, don't you? I'm looking here at 2 Peter chapter 1 again, and there in verse 5 I see that word diligence. Peter says to his readers for this very reason, giving all diligence. Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, and so on and so forth.

But notice what he says. Giving all diligence. Now, what is diligence? Well, diligence is the opposite of sluggishness, isn't it? It's one thing to be slow, sluggish, and it's quite a different thing to be diligent.

Now, it's quite amazing how people can be so very diligent in some areas of life and so very slow and sluggish in spiritual things. Oh, if we just go about spiritual things with the same diligence that we apply in other areas of life, my, how much we would advance and progress in spiritual things. If we would just apply to the spiritual realm the same diligence that we use in other areas.

Just take for instance the matter of sports. Oh, people, they really get interested in this, don't they? I mean, they apply diligence there. They're not sluggish when it comes time to go to a game and to watch their favorite team.

No, they're involved. They're engaged in that. They're totally wrapped up in it.

But how frequently these people who are so diligent in that area are sluggish and slow in the spiritual area. I've noticed this over the years that people, whenever it comes time to go watch their favorite team play ball, they can't wait to get there. They'll talk about it days in advance.

And this is what they might say. They might say, well, you know, I just can't wait. I just can't wait.

When's the last time you heard somebody say, oh, I just can't wait till Sunday gets here. Just can't wait to get to church. Just can't wait to get to hear the preaching of the word.

Why? It's been a long time since I heard anybody talk like that. Why? Well, the answer is because we tend to be sluggish in the area in which we're called to be diligent. And we are diligent in other areas that aren't all that important.

Now, you've got to be diligent if you're going to grow. You've got to diligently use the means that God has appointed. Means that God's appointed for growth.

Now, what are these means that God has appointed for growth? Well, the primary means for Christian growth. I wonder if you know what you possess when you take a Bible in your hand. Oh, do you have the slightest idea about the value of the Bible? Do you have the slightest idea of the value of this book? The primary means for spiritual growth is the word of God.

Oh, what value this word of God has. What a treasure this word is. Why, look at it there in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 2. Did you notice this? As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word.

What words are you talking about? The word of God. That you may grow thereby. You cannot grow spiritually apart from the word of God.

And the more of the word of God you take in, the more you will grow spiritually. So we're going to be looking at that next Sunday. Growth through the word.

And then here are some other means that God's appointed as well. Prayer and worship. And we're going to be talking about those things.

But here today we have talked about the desire for growth planted in us at spiritual birth, the areas of growth, Christian knowledge, Christian graces, Christian duties, and the means for growth. Diligent use of the means that God has appointed. The word of God, worship and prayer.

Let's bow together for prayer. Father, help us to have hearts for growth. Help us, oh God, not to be sluggish in this vital area.

Not to be slow. We remember that the Lord Jesus rebuked the disciples with whom he was walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. And he told them that they were slow of heart.

Father, we look around today and we see the church of Jesus and it seems as if that the church is declining in so many ways today. And, Father, we have to believe that much of it is due to our own slowness. Our slowness of heart.

Our sluggishness in spiritual things. Father, we pray that right here at Parkview there will be a return to spiritual vitality. Oh God, drive the sluggishness away from us.

Drive the slowness away. And bring in, Father, hearts that are diligent in the things of God. Father, we pray that we will see a mighty moving of your spirit even in these days in our hearts.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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