

Faithfulness

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

Spiritual degeneration is a state of becoming spiritually immature, dull, or sluggish, and failing to make progress in one's Christian life, which is sinful and can be remedied through regular exercise of our spiritual faculties.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1, Philippians 1:9, Hebrews 5:11, Hebrews 6:1, 1 John 2:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Maturity"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the four classes of Christians: babes, growing Christians, mature Christians, and invalids, emphasizing the dangers of spiritual degeneration and the importance of continuous growth in faith and maturity. He warns against becoming stagnant in spiritual growth, highlighting the need to discern between good and evil, and the harmful effects of remaining spiritually immature. However, he also provides hope by outlining how spiritual degeneration is remediable through prayer, daily study of the Word, and active trust, love, obedience, and hope in God.

Transcript

Five times in the New Testament Christians are compared to "babes" (1 Cor. 3, 1 Cor. 14, Eph. 4, Heb. 5, and 1 Peter 2), a term which normally indicates the commencement and early stages of the Christian life. But there is this great difference between them. The first, third and fifth refer to the beginning of the Christian life, to the need of growth, and of not remaining children. But the second and fourth partake of the nature of warnings, though there is a significant difference between the point of the warning in each case. In 1 Corinthians 14 an appeal is made to the Corinthian Churches not to "become" children in their mental life, though they are to continue babes, innocent, childlike, in regard to evil. In Hebrews 5 they are warned on the ground that they had once made progress but had reverted to spiritual babyhood ("become," verse 12). This is worse than childhood, it is second childhood; it is not immaturity but dotage, not juvenility but senility. And it is to warn and safeguard them that he now writes in such plain terms. He says he cannot teach them high, deep, full, rich truths, such as that of the Priesthood of Christ (verse 11) because of this state of spiritual dotage.

There are thus four classes of Christians: "babes"; growing Christians; mature or full-grown Christians; and invalids. If we study 1 John 2:12-14, we shall see the first three classes described; and if we wish to avoid becoming Christians of the fourth class, we shall do well to ponder the passage in Hebrews 5, and apply its truths rigidly to our own lives as we consider the solemn truth of Spiritual Degeneration.

I. Spiritual Degeneration Is Possible

God's will for us is progress. "Grow in grace" (2 Peter 3), "Let us be borne on to maturity" (Greek of Heb. 6:1). Progress is always in relation to the will of God. That will is to be increasingly known, accepted, obeyed, loved and enjoyed. The Old and New Testaments teem with commands, encouragements, entreaties, warnings on this subject. Conversion is but the start; what is also needed is continuance. "Daniel continued" (chap. 1). "Daniel prospered" (chap. 6). "Wherefore ... I continue" (Acts 26). "If ye continue" (John 8). "Continue in the faith" (Col. 1). "Patient continuance" (Rom. 2).

The body makes progress almost spontaneously, as it were, though even this is according to law. The progress of mind and soul, however, is not so apparently spontaneous, but is dependent on the will, and upon the constant and strenuous observance of definite laws of training. Yet it must be borne in mind that spiritual progress does not mean primarily intellectual power of achievement, but increased spiritual capacity and deeper experience, a tenderer conscience, a more fully surrendered will. In reference to these elements God's message is, "Go forward."

God's will for us is often not fulfilled. The growth is stunted, the capacity contracted, the life hindered through lack of progress. The main characteristic of this is an inability to discern between good and evil, between good and better, between good and best (Phil. 1:9-10). The Hebrew Christians are described as "heavy of hearing" (5:11), and "unskillful" (5:13). This does not mean that the soul ever becomes unregenerate again, but it certainly means that it becomes degenerate.

What are the causes of this backsliding and degeneration? Sometimes it is due to worldliness which, like a bad atmosphere, penetrates, lowers the temperature and chokes the vitality. There are not a few sad instances of this spirit influencing earnest Christians. "We did run well, what doth hinder you?" Sometimes the trouble is due to what may be called "weariness," a spiritual and moral sluggishness which does not wish to go forward, an inertness which tends to sap the vigour and spiritual buoyancy. Sometimes, however, the cause is willfulness, some secret sin which leads to unfaithfulness and tends to eat away the spiritual life. As a rule this degeneration does not occur all at once. As the old Latin proverb says, "No one suddenly becomes base." Like a great tree which, though gradually affected by fungi, may topple over at once in some storm of wind, so a spiritual life may be infected by error and evil silently and secretly for a long time, and then, in a moment of special test and strong temptation, a catastrophe occurs. Let us, then, write it on heart and mind and conscience that spiritual degeneration is possible.

II. Spiritual Degeneration Is Sinful

God gives us full opportunity to grow. "Because of the time (Heb. 5:12) ye ought to be" very different. The time since their conversion was so long that they ought to have grown wonderfully since then. To use Dr. Andrew Murray's illustration, a babe of three months is a beautiful picture, natural and delightful, but a babe of twenty years old would be a monstrosity. If a person had come to the age of manhood and still possessed only the body and brain of a babe, how terribly sad would the circumstances be. What, then, must God think and feel concerning those who have been "in Christ," born again for years, and are in spiritual experience only babes? May we not term them, without exaggeration, spiritual monstrosities?

The neglect of our opportunity for growth is sin. We cannot command growth, but we can hinder it, and it is this that constitutes our sin. There are Christians who are always talking of their preference for the "simple gospel," and they believe they are showing their faithfulness and humility, when all unconsciously, but very really, they are testifying to their own unfaithfulness and laziness. Those who speak of wishing for nothing

save "Christ, and Him crucified," must not forget that in that very chapter (1 Cor. 2) St. Paul goes on to say, "But we speak wisdom among the mature" Christians. The fact is that "Christ crucified" covers the whole Christian life from grace to glory, and is concerned not only with the simplest but also with the deepest truths. It is a mark of immaturity to be content with that which is perfectly obvious without thought and trouble, and immaturity is sin if we are neglecting opportunities of ripeness and power. The call is clear not to continue to lay spiritual foundations, that is, to be content with elementary truths (Heb. 6:1).

III. Spiritual Degeneration Is Harmful

It is harmful to ourselves. We become dull, or heavy, or sluggish of hearing (5:11). We have no spiritual digestion, but must perforce be content with the plainest fare (5:12). And with dull perceptions and weak powers of assimilation we are a prey to the microbes of temptation which are powerless against the vigour of health. We are liable to contract the malaria of worldliness, and all other dangers attendant on a low state of health. In the East a gentleman once wished to test the truth of the statement that the sheep will not follow a stranger, and the shepherd told him that only the sick sheep would respond to his call. And so he found it. What a lesson is this! Who are the people that go here and there, accept this or that newest fad in teaching, go astray into error and sin? The sick sheep. Those who do not know how to discern between good and evil, and are a prey to every deceiver.

It is harmful to others. "Because of the time" since conversion, such "babes" "ought to be teachers," but instead of this they need still to be taught their spiritual alphabet. They ought to be feeding others, instead of being themselves fed. Churches remain nurseries when they ought to be training grounds. What a loss to others this means! The silent Christians are "dumb dogs," leaving all teaching to a few, with the result that only a little work is done, and the neighbourhoods of their churches are not evangelized. "Ye ought to be teachers." They ought to have the knowledge to enable them, the interest to incite them, and the loyalty to compel them to be helpers of others. Oh! the unutterable sadness of the little work done when so much more could be done with the actually existing number of Christian people.

IV. Spiritual Degeneration Is Remediable

How? We must start from the foundations, but not stay there. Axioms in mathematics are necessary foundations, but no one dreams of simply going on learning them. They are to be used. We commence all education by learning the alphabet, but we do not limit ourselves to this process; we use the letters! The old masters had only the primary colours of red, blue and yellow, but how marvelous were the combinations "by reason of use". So must it be in the Christian life. In one sense we must "leave" the rudiments and "go on" to ripeness (6:1). It is "by reason of use" (5:14) that we grow and make progress. Just as in learning a foreign tongue we must have daily practice, setting the same brain cells in vibration every day, just as a pianist needs constant practice if the joints are to be kept flexible and supple, and the execution become more proficient, so the believer needs "use," exercise, training, if he is to "go on to perfection". What is this "use"?

There must be the atmosphere of prayer. There must be the daily exercise of prayer and intercession. Daily appearing before God and realizing the spiritual perception, spiritual enlargement, and spiritual power that come from waiting on God.

There must be the use of good food, the daily exercise of study and meditation, daily feeding on the Word of God, and this never allowed to be intermitted.

There must be activity, the daily action of trust, love, obedience, and hope. Trust in the Real Presence of our God and Father. Love to Christ and to man in Him. Obedience to every known command of God's Word. Hope in Him whose coming is our "Blessed Hope". And this daily, hourly, momentarily, until it becomes the very fiber of our being.

This is the exercise, or "use" of our spiritual faculties, and the result will be that we shall never degenerate but go forward from strength to strength. Thus, living in the atmosphere of prayer, feeding on the food of the Word, and exercising ourselves in practical living in and for God, we shall know what the true Christian life really is in its continual growth, its exultant joy, its spiritual power, its blessed usefulness, its deepening peace, its widening influence, and its unceasing witness to the grace and glory of God

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/faithfulness/>

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