

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

*Information taken from “Christian Growth”, by author Russell T. Hitt. The author presents a comprehensive view of what it means to grow as a Christian. The author is not responsible for everything that I have written in this study.

INTRODUCTION:

Definition: Growth is the act of taking Bible doctrine or Biblical truth and becoming what God wants you to become, then serving Him. Growth is often confused with religious or cultic ideas.

James 1:22, “But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

1. Growth does not come through mental self-flagellation, whipping yourself, torturing yourself, denying yourself pleasures, or beating yourself with guilt.
2. Christ paid for our sins through His suffering, therefore we don't have to, 1 Peter 2:21-24.
3. False growth concepts:
 - 1) Our good works saves us or helps in achieving our salvation, Ephesians 2:8.
 - 2) The physical body is “evil” and is to be denied pleasure to gain salvation. For example, Simon Stylites sat on a pillar for 37 years to deny himself pleasures in order to gain salvation.

Neo-Platonism denied the incarnation of Christ for they believed a physical body wasevil. True Christianity never preaches that our bodies are “prisons of the soul” as taught by Neo-Platonism. See Romans 12:1-2; 6:13 which teaches that our bodies are to be used to serve God.
 - 3) Today mankind tries to gain salvation or spirituality through legalistic codes, distortions of the Mosaic Law, do's and don'ts of a man-made religious superstructure to guide conduct but they do not provide salvation and do not provide spirituality. Galatians 3:23-4:7.

Questions:

How do I tell how or if I am growing?

What is the measuring stick of growth?

What is the soul result and body result of growth?

What keeps a believer from growing?

1. A Personal Diagnosis is the first necessary step:

A. One has to be born again before there can be spiritual life, John 3.

1) Christianity is Christ and He is Deity, John 14:6; John 11:25-26.

2) Man is depraved for he is full of jealousy, criticism, envy, hate, anger, all which condemn his respectability.

3) Sin is not an emotional disorder, it is a rebellion against God. In Matthew 15:18-20 Christ pointed out the problem of mankind is what is in his heart and that defiles him.

4) Man is out of tune with the glory of God, (Romans 3:23), and he does not reflect the divine character. (Revelation 5:3-4, no one is worthy before God except Christ.)

5. "You are a sinner if you are less perfect than God" –Barnhouse

a) We have no goodness in us that pleases God.

b) Only God can rescue us from sin, Romans 7:24-25.

B. God alone saves us through GRACE. He reaches out to us; we cannot reach out to Him. Grace is God's character coming to us; it is not because we are good and deserve it, it is because we are corrupt and don't deserve it. "It is the voice of God that awakens, arouses, that causes man to think and inquire."

Sin prevents our union with God; grace enables us to share in God's love.

Our response is faith; faith is accepting God's ideas.

Solution: 1 Timothy 1:15, Christ came into the world to save sinners.

C. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ He is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold, all things become new." There is an unseen spiritual transaction in the soul at the point of salvation. We become

new creatures in Christ but others don't see it until we live our new faith outwardly.

2. Shared life with Christ

- A. We have our same identity, but we begin to lose some out of self-centeredness. Matthew 20:26-28 shows we become servants.
- B. To become a servant means we have new freedom, Romans 8:21.
- C. "In Christ," union with Christ, Ephesians 1:4.
 - 1) We are united with Christ and we cannot grow without being fed by Him, John 15.
 - 2) Paul shows that Christ must develop in you before you are growing, Galatians 2:20.
 - 3. I died with Christ, to the old ways of living and the lusts of the old sin nature. I don't need to follow the old sin nature any more, Romans 6.
 - 4. **Faith 1**—salvation faith
Faith 2—growth faith, dying to old sin nature's desires and lusts by filling of the Holy Spirit, plus knowledge of doctrine and REFUSING to concentrate on that sin, 2 Corinthians 4:10, dying of the Lord Jesus is seen in us. Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, that is the reason God saved us. This relates to the angelic conflict in that Satan is defeated by God in us!

How many Christians do you know that remind you of Jesus Christ?

Faith 3—Expecting faith, reaching out to others, then watches for God to take action.

Growth in grace and knowledge is to make you like Christ, not like your pastor, teachers, dad, mom, etc. We are to bear the image of our God, 2 Peter 1:4.

Faith 2 enables the believer to cope with daily problems and contradictions of our own personalities.

Faith 2 will not make you perfect, a little tin-god, or a holy saint, but it will enable you to know Christ.

- D. Meditation on the Word of God. This helps you discover who Christ is. Bible class alone does not open the door because you must believe and use the truth that is taught.
- 1) Psalm 119:9-16, meditation.
 - 2) Psalm 1:1-2, day and night thinking about the Word.
 - 3) Purpose of a prescription is to get you to a druggist, and purpose of the Bible is to get you to Christ.
 - 4) Prayer, reading, meditation is what moves you personally closer to Christ, then praise and worship follows.
 - 5) This gives you confidence and you witness, tell others.

- E. True spiritual growth always leads you to fellowship with other believers. 1 Corinthians 12, your spiritual gift is for the benefit of others. The idea of a solitary believer not joined to a company of Christians is never taught in the Bible. Ephesians 5:25-33 teaches us that Christ has Bride, a company of believers working together to honor Him. We do not stand alone.

It is foolish for a believer to think he can make it on his own when Christ intends to bring the whole church to maturity and then to heaven all at once.

Christians are made for fellowship with each other so they can benefit from others and they can benefit from you. Ephesians 6:6-8; 4:12-19.

3. Having a thorn, not a star.

- A. God does allow the growing believer to suffer pain and discomfort as they advance. Often the more the advance the more the suffering to strengthen the believer.
- 1) Pressure and tribulation are designed to cause us to advance rapidly, Romans 5:2-5; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

The purpose of Christiansuffering is to make Christ more real, and the believer more reliant upon HIM. We are made stronger when we are helpless and don't have any strength to rely upon, 2 Corinthians 12:10.

- B. God does lovingly discipline us when we need to be taught a point of justice, Hebrews 12:5-6, 10-11.
- 1) The Eastern goldsmith sat on the floor by his crucible. When asked, "How do you know when the gold is refined and purified? He answered: "When I can see my face in it."
 - 2) When we can see ourselves in the mirror of God then we have been purified.
 - 3) Failures or set backs in finances, health, social status, are ways God purifies us.
- 4) We should not ask "why", rather we should ask "to what end?" God is trying to show us something. The direction of our suffering is to teach us something.

PRINCIPLE: The man of faith must recognize the sovereignty of God in his life so that he does not become angry when suffering occurs.

PRINCIPLE: Recognize that, in pain, God is at work and there is an end and purpose to the suffering.

PRINCIPLE: Christ becomes our teacher when we are pressed out of our comfort zone. When we enter a time of suffering the Lord teaches us for we are on unfamiliar ground. A crisis clarifies the issues of our heart and reveals our need for mercy, forgiveness, and healing (1 Samuel 2:6-7). Romans 5:3-5 teaches us that true persecution is designed to show us how to walk with the Lord on unfamiliar ground. James 1:24 teaches the same principle.

PRINCIPLE: "Pain and suffering are God's MEGAPHONE shouting something to us what He wants us to learn". (C. S. Lewis)

2 Corinthians 4:11, the life of Christ may be manifested in us through suffering. God wounds and then God heals. Healing only comes from God, the soul and body healing; no matter how much medicine we take. He is the One who begins and ends the trial.

C. Growth is learning to overcome the lusts of the body and old sin nature.

- 1) 1 Corinthians 9:27; Romans 8:13, In our flesh we are first and foremost enemies of Christ and must learn to submit to His will.
 - 2) Galatians 5:19-21 illustrates the corruption of our self-will and old sin nature.
 - 3) Romans 6:16, you are the slave of what you surrender to.
 - 4) Colossians 2:20-23 shows us that restraining ourselves is not the way to have victory. Do's and don'ts do not accomplish anything. It is saying "No", then allowing the HOLY SPIRIT to lead you through the testing or suffering recalling the promises of God's Word.

D. Growth is giving of yourself for benefit of others, 1 Corinthians 13; Romans 12:9-14; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Matthew 5:44-46.

- 1) The giving of oneself to the benefit of others who may not like us nor appreciate our service reflects the mind of Christ. This is what our Lord faced.
- 2) Our most cherished idol is our own EGO! It takes the filling of the Holy Spirit to break through our ego and reach out to help others. See: The story of the Good Samaritan—Luke 10:29.
- 3) Hebrews 11, Heroes Hall of Faith records mature believers who helped their families, tribes, and nation even when they were not appreciated at the time.

Faith 1—Believing Faith, faith-believing the doctrine taught.

Faith 2—Adjusting Faith - making sacrifices in your own life covers Hebrews 11 heroes.

Faith 3—Expecting faith - reaching out to others, and watches for God to act.

- 4) Obeying the truth, Titus 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22.

Faith means abandoning all trust in one's own resources. It means casting yourself unreservedly upon the mercy of God.

Faith means laying hold of the promises of God in Christ, relying entirely on the finished work of Christ for salvation, and on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit for daily strength.

Faith implies complete reliance on God and full obedience to God.

4. Having faith in the future – HOPE is faith expressed in future tense.
 - The object of hope is Jesus Christ.
 - The object of hope is the Bible.
 - The object of hope is confidence, assurance in the character of God.
- A. The futility of man's existence is seen in his attempts to find happiness in the devil's world. What do people do to find fulfillment or validation in life?
 - 1) What do they do when they can't find it? Drugs, alcohol, escape or isolation, making money, but they have no eternal HOPE.
- B. HOPE is what the Bible gives to man.
 - 1) God promised the Jews a land flowing with milk and honey if they would follow Him, Exodus 3:8, Deuteronomy 1:25.
 - 2) Christian hope is related to the fact of the TRIUMPHANT RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, 1 Corinthians 15:19.
 - 3) Christians must realize that we are hooked up with an all-knowing, all-powerful God who has all things under His control. All events are related to time and the plan of God. They are all interconnected, not a meaningless mass of events as man often views history.
 - 4) The Christian hope is a confidence in a living God, 1 Timothy 4:10, who personally intervenes in human life and can be trusted to implement His promises to us. In Job 13:15 we see hope for Job says, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless, I will argue my ways before Him."
David said in Psalms 39:7 "And now Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You." (See: Psalm 62:5).
 - 5) This kind of hope does not depend upon us but rather upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us. He creates the hope. Proverbs 13:12 says that God's hope in our souls does not make our hearts sick.

- 5) Romans 4:18, our hope in some event or circumstance happening may be against normal expectations, but spiritual grace arises in the soul by the Holy Spirit's actions. Our hope is anchored in belief of the written word not in what we see (Romans 8:24).

Romans 15:4, the Bible was written so that we may have HOPE.
Romans 15:4 gives hope - Resurrection of Christ

- Written Word Belief
- Ministry - Romans 5:5, Hebrews 1:19
- God's Hope doesn't disappoint, 1 Peter 3:15
- God's past performance when hope is seen in supernatural intervention, 1 John 3:2-3, Titus 2:11-14

5. Providence of God—God is in control.

A. Divine guidance, man cannot lead himself, Jeremiah 10:23.

B. Providence means that God alters the events of history so that His will is done. He transforms circumstances, changes things when your prayers please Him. Proverbs 16:7 shows us that our enemies are reconciled to us when they are reconciled to God. John 8:29; 2 Timothy 3:12; John 8:37.

- 1) We may have gray areas in our lives where we don't know what to think, to say, how to act. This is intentional. God allows these things to take place so that we will rely upon HIM in prayer for the answer.
- 2) We ask for guidance in an area then God will lead us, but not until we go to HIM and ask for it. Romans 6.

C. How to know if you are being led of the Lord and not your emotions?

- 1) Does it violate the basic Ten Commandments?
- 2) Does it violate any Scripture or doctrine you have learned?
- 3) Do you want it because of your own exaltation or Christ's?
- 4) Is this guidance motivated by your love of God?
- 5) Is it consistent with your income, schedule, priorities?

- 6) Are you in fellowship? Are you willing to wait for a few weeks, or is this a lust pattern you have at the moment.
- D. 1 John 3:16-18, to know if we are living the right kind of doctrinal life or are we being selfish.
- E. Galatians 6:9-10, reaching out from your own resources and helping someone else out. Giving them a pair of gloves, a coat, a helping hand, sharing something you have with someone else.
1. Bear their burdens, Galatians 6:2.
 2. Galatians 5:13, we are to be servants for one another.
- F. The joy of the Christian life: it is not a burden that we carry through life each day but rather it is a feasting and fellowship with the Lord, a time of laughter and relaxation, (Ecclesiastes 3:4; Mark 6:31, time to take off and rest).
- G. Giving money is another way we learn, Luke 6:38, we give and receive it back with interest.

GROWTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Ephesians 2:20-22, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. [21]In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord. [22] In whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Ephesians 4:14-15, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, [15] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 1:3, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other abounds.”

1 Peter 2:2, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it.

2 Peter 3:18, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever.”

Build, built (builder, building)

Matthew 7:24, “Therefore, whosoever hears these saying of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.”

Acts 20:32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified.”

1 Corinthians 3:10-12, “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let every man take heed how he builds upon it. [11] For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble— ”

Colossians 2:7, “Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding with thanksgiving.”