

HOW CHRISTIANS GROW

II PETER 1: 5-7

Need: To add the things to our faith that make growth possible.

Proposition: There are qualities that must be added to our saving faith if we are to grow in our Christian life.

Objective: To lead the saved to take the necessary steps to growth.

Introduction.

How long have you been a believer in Jesus Christ? When did you first understand that He was your only hope of eternal life? When did you first trust the salvation of your soul to Him alone? This is what Peter means by “faith” in our text. Faith is relying upon Christ Jesus alone for salvation: it is receiving Him into your life as your Lord and Savior.

How much have you grown in your Christian life? What have you added to that initial faith that brought into the family of God? Such questions remind us that we need some kind of objective standard by which to measure our growth. Our text is not meant to be a standard by which to measure our growth, but it will help us determine how much we have grown by indicating what we have added to our saving faith. Too many of us have been content to just be born again; we have not put much priority on Christian growth. God puts priority on growth.

We need to be clear about some basic things. First, growth follows birth. You must be born into the family of God in spiritual birth before you can begin to grow. You do not grow into eternal life, but rather you grow in the life of the Lord. Second, God has made

adequate provisions for our growth. You have everything you need in Christ in order to grow in your Christian life. Third, growth does require diligence on your part. None of us will ever automatically grow spiritually any more than a newborn child will grow without parental care and attention. With these basic things in mind let's consider what must be added to our faith for us to grow.

I. GOODNESS---The application of faith to life.

The King James translates the word "virtue". Some newer translations render it "moral excellence". The word is used of God in the sense of His moral perfection. It is used of the Christian in a relative sense.

In this context it refers to the application of faith to the rest of life. Once you know that you have Christ as your Savior and Lord, you begin to relate this reality to the rest of your life. You must begin to adjust your daily to this supreme relationship that you have with the Lord Jesus Christ. You begin to explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. a believer in the Lord Jesus, in your relationship to your family, on your job, in your relationships in the world. You are not content to simply see Christ Jesus as a fire insurance policy to keep you out of Hell; rather you see Him as the Lord of all of your life. Growing Christians add this moral excellence, this application of their faith to all of life, to their saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. How serious have you been about bringing all of life under the Lordship of Christ? Are you allowing this saving relationship to impact the other areas of your life? This is a vital part of spiritual growth.

II. KNOWLEDGE---A growing knowledge of the Lord.

A certain amount of knowledge must be present before there can be saving faith, but it does not need to be, by any means, a complete or mature knowledge of the Lord. In order

to trust Him for salvation you must have some knowledge of Who He is and some understanding of What He has done for you on the Cross, but there will always be more to be learned.

The knowledge is personal. It is the kind of knowledge that comes from interaction with a person. The living God is a Person. The Lord Jesus is a living person who can be known. You must be prepared to do whatever is necessary to get to know Him better. Your growth as a Christian is directly tied to your personal, experiential knowledge of the Lord.

This is where the discipline of prayer and Bible Study come into play. This also involves the cultivation of a personal walk with the Lord daily. Your faithfulness in worship and in ministry is also important. You will want to take advantage of any opportunity to know the Lord better. Since you have a developing love for the living God, love wants to know its object as fully as possible.

III. SELF CONTROL---The discipline of life under the control of the Holy Spirit.

The word is translated “temperance” in the King James, but it is no longer an appropriate translation since “temperance” is now associated with only one kind of self control—that related to the use of alcohol. The word has in it the idea of being in strength, to have power within to exercise control over the desires of the old flesh nature and the appetites of the body.

There is a negative side to the self-control. They are appetites in the body that in themselves are good, but if they are not kept under control, they can become destructive.

There are desires in the old sin nature that if they are not control, they will bring

destruction to everything good in your life. Your progress in the Christian life will be partly determined by your ability to control these negative forces in your life.

There is a positive side to this control. It is just as important that you be able to develop in you life the good habits that will aid in spiritual growth. They require a good measure of self-control.

But where do you find this self-control to add to your faith? You must remember that the Lord has already provided everything that you need in order to live the Christian life.

Paul makes this self control one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. If we will allow Him to control our lives, the Holy Spirit will form in us the inner control that is needed to exercise self-control. We are without excuse. We have a wonderful Helper who will enable us to bring our undisciplined life under His control.

Let me ask you to do a little self-assessment here, even as I search my own heart—are there areas of my life that are basically out of control? Do sinful desires exercise too much control over my life? Am I neglecting important practices simply because I lack self-control? You must give attention to this if you are to be a growing Christian!

IV. PERSEVERANCE—The strength to keep going when difficulties come.

The word is usually translated “patience” in the New Testament. It has in it the basic idea of bearing up under. So the word can have in it a passive idea such as the idea in patience. But it can also have in it the more active idea suggested by the word perseverance.

This reminds us of something very basic in the Christian life—we will not live our lives in a “safe” environment. Christian growth is not the kind that takes place in a protected greenhouse. Rather this growth will take place right out in the storms of life. We will be

subjected to the same trials and temptations that others who are not Christians face.

However if we are to grow in the Christian life, we must add to our lives this patience or perseverance. We must find the inner strength to bear up under the burdens and storms that come against us.

Where do we find this strength to bear up under? You need to know that this too is one of the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit who lives within you has all the inner strength needed to enable you to bear up under the storms that come. As the years go by you should be stronger and stronger in this inner strength. By the time you come to the end of your Christian life you should be so strong that nothing will tempt you to turn back from following the Lord.

Be warned! You better add this soon for you will need it. Otherwise you are destined to spiritual failure and fruitlessness.

V. GODLINESS—An attitude of reverence toward God.

Peter used this word four times in this little letter. The basic idea in the word is that of having an attitude toward God of reverence; of having a deep desire to do the things that are pleasing in the sight of the Lord. It is living your life with an awareness of God, and deep respect for him in all of your life. The godly person is someone who lives a god-centered life in contrast to the person who lives life without any regard for God.

No one naturally has this quality in his or her lives—it has to be added. As you add the knowledge of the Lord, which we have already considered, godliness should begin to develop. The more you know of the Lord the deeper your desire will be to please Him. Without doubt “godliness” was a prominent part of the life of the Lord Jesus. He lived every day with an awareness of God and with a commitment to do only those things that

were pleasing to Him. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit He has made provision for the development of this in our lives. You can expect the Holy Spirit to give to you a desire to do the things pleasing in the sight of the Lord. You can expect Him to keep you aware of areas of your life that are not pleasing to the Lord.

How are you doing on this one? Have you added it to your life? Is it obvious to those who know you best that you are full of reverence toward God and that you really do strive to live a life pleasing toward God?

VI. BROTHERLY KINDNESS—a genuine affection for others in the family.

This particular word has an interesting make up. The combining of two Greek words—the word for brother and the word for affection, forms it. So it is the warm affection that you feel for those who are close to you. In this context it probably refers to our attitude toward and response to brothers and sisters who make up the household of faith, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a reminder to us that we are to maintain a healthy relationship with others who make up the family of faith. Since we do not naturally have affection for those who are members of this community of faith, we must add it to our Christian life. Ever though there will be some in the family of faith who will be a challenge to you, if you are serious about Christian growth, you will allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with His affection for members of the brotherhood.

Have you added this to your faith? It is fairly easy to spot this kind of affection. It will express itself in words of affection. I am so often grieved by the words that I hear Christians speak of each other and to each other. I hear Christians speak more critically and angrily of members of the brotherhood than they do of the most despicable enemies

of all that is good. They will speak of another Christians like you would expect them to speak of a drug lord or a pimp on the street. Surely they have not added brotherly kindness.

This brotherly kindness should also be seen in deeds of kindness. Every one of us will have need of such kindness along the path of life. We will have opportunities to help each other. The Holy Spirit will make you sensitive to such opportunities if you will allow Him to have control in your life.

If you do not add this to your life, you forfeit any hope of real spiritual growth. Your commitment to develop healthy, loving relationships with fellow Christians in the household of faith will determine the extent of your spiritual growth. None of us will grow to be healthy, fruitful Christians without good relationships to fellow believers.

VII. LOVE—The ultimate sign of our growth.

Peter saves the most important to last. “Love” appears last in his list because it is the one toward which all of the others are moving. The word translated love here is the word most commonly related to God’s love in the New Testament. It is the word that John uses when he declares “God is love”. It is the word Paul uses when he explains, “The fruit of the Spirit is love”. It is active good will toward those who do not deserve it.

If “brotherly kindness” relates us to fellow members in the household of faith, this love relates us to all men. The Scriptures declare that “God so loved the world that He gave”. The Holy Spirit who lives in us can make us a channel of God’s love to an undeserving world.

If you really want to measure your spiritual growth, the love test should be helpful. Do you really love people who do not deserve your love? Do you have a concern for those

who have done you wrong? Do you look for ways to bless those who have spoken unkind things about you? How long has it been since you did a deed of kindness toward a stranger, or helped someone whom you did not know? This love test will probably humble you—it will leave you with an awareness that there is still much to be done in this growing business.

Let me encourage you! The blessed Holy Spirit who lives in you is ready to help you add love. If you will admit to Him that you cannot do it on your own, then ask Him, He will do it. The only condition will be that you give the Lord God the credit.

There is a warning or two that I need to leave with you. While these things that are to be added are listed one after the other, this does not mean that you can start with moral excellence and work down the list one at a time. No! You must give attention to them as a group. You do not work on brotherly kindness for a while, and then move up to love for all men. Rather if you leave out one of them, you will never have the others. There will never be godliness if you leave out perseverance. You will never have knowledge if you leave out self-control.

Just one closing thought for all of us. Have you noticed that there is horizontal and a vertical side to these things to be added? Growth in the Christian life is both growth in our walk with God and our walk with our fellowman. You cannot have one without the other. This is really a call for a new seriousness about the development of our Christian lives. Are you ready to step things up a notch! God is ready.

Where do you begin? Let me urge you to take some positive steps today. Why not confess to the Lord that you are aware that you have not grown, as you should? If one of

these seven things to be added has been especially convicting confess it to the Lord this very morning.

Then set aside some time to consider what needs to be done. You may want to make yourself accountable to some fellow Christian. They can help you begin to build into your life the things that are important to growth. You may need to become more faithful in your Bible Study and worship attendance. You may need to find a place of personal ministry where you can give out some of the love the Lord has placed in your heart. Ask the Lord to guide you. But above all, determine today that you will not be content to stay where you are in your Christian life.