

WHEN CHRISTIANS GROW: Part 2
2 Peter 1:8-11

Need: Christian Growth

Proposition: Christian growth produces some very positive results in the life of the Christian.

Objective: To encourage Christians to do those things which produce spiritual growth.

Introduction:

Giving your life to Jesus Christ is just the beginning. Believer's baptism is the event that marks this blessed beginning. Unfortunately for some the beginning has proven to be the best part of their lives. Their testimonies always focus on that wonderful day when they first met the Lord. They loved Him more than they ever have since. They knew more joy than they have ever known since. Surely this is not the way the Christian life was supposed to be.

The New Birth is to be followed by growth. This is the call of our text. After urging upon us the importance of the growth of the Christian, Peter gives us four positive fruits of growth. They are set forth to give us encouragement in "giving diligence" to this matter of growth.

Already we have considered two of them. First, we noted that when Christians grow, they are productive in their service. They will not be "barren" or "unfruitful." Rather their lives will be a blessing to the world about them and a satisfaction to God. Second, we noted that when Christians grow, they are assured of salvation. They do not earn their salvation through their spiritual growth, but they do gain and give clear evidence that they have been saved. The Christian who does not grow will be lacking in assurance, and will have a hard time convincing the world that he is truly a Christian.

Before turning away from this theme, we are given two other positive results of growing as a Christian. They are set forth clearly to give us encouragement in our efforts to grow. If you will consider these fruits carefully, I am convinced that you will redouble your commitment to Christian growth.

I. WHEN CHRISTIANS GROW, THEY ARE STEADFAST IN THEIR WALK.

"For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Again we find a reference to "these things." What are they? It could refer to making your calling and election sure. There is a direct connection between Christian assurance and the steadfastness with which a person walks in the world. The Christian without assurance will always be uncertain and vulnerable.

However, in this context, "these things" are best interpreted in the broader context. They are the things that we are to add to our faith. It involves giving diligence to the matter of spiritual growth. It might be well for us to notice that we "do" these things--not believe them. While it is important to believe right, it is also important to do right. There is an effort to be extended, a discipline to be imposed on the life, some matters to be attended to. Without them there will be no growth; and without growth there will be no steadfastness.

The writer is very positive about this fruit of growth. He utilizes the Greek double negative to state it very emphatically. He declares "You shall never fall ever." The right kind of growth will just exclude the possibility of us ever falling.

What is the meaning of the word "fall" in this text? Does the Apostle mean to affirm that we will never stumble into sin? Does he mean that we never commit an act of sin? Both Christian experience and the light of scripture prohibit such an understanding of the verse. Even growing Christians have known the sorrow that a stumble into sin can bring. What does it mean? While

it may not exclude the possibility of committing an act of sin, it does assure us of steadfastness in our battle with temptation and sin. The growing Christian will be marked by a continuing victory in the confrontations with sin. So much of our spiritual defeat can be traced to our spiritual immaturity. We are vulnerable because we are spiritually weak. Those who grow develop a strength that makes them steadfast in their daily walk through this kind of world.

However, the larger context of this letter would suggest another thought. The primary concern of Peter when he wrote this letter was the danger created for the Christians by the rise of false teachers. He will spend a whole chapter warning about their appearance. To succumb to them is surely a spiritual tragedy of the worst kind. How can a person be sure of steadfastness in confrontations with false teachers? The only way is to be a growing Christian. It has always been the practice of false teachers to prey upon the immature and weak Christians.

Paul expressed the same concern to the Ephesians. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every kind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." (Ephesians 4:14) Have you been wavering? Do you change your spiritual allegiances about once a month? Do you sense that you are gullible? Then you need to give attention to growth. Only growth will bring the steadfastness that is needed in your daily walk.

The ultimate application of this word is that you will never fall away from your commitment to Jesus Christ. You will be faithful unto the end--you will truly persevere. You are in desperate danger of backsliding, and bringing disgrace on the name of Christ unless you grow. Only growth will produce this steadfastness. Those who grow will not fall!

II. WHEN CHRISTIANS GROW, THEY ARE PREPARED FOR HEAVEN.

"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The New International Version catches the message beautifully, "and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This fruit will wait until the coming of the Lord to be gathered. The other three are all harvested in the here and now. This involves how we will enter into the presence of the Lord. Will we come before Him in glory or in shame?

The Apostle gives us some helpful insight into the nature of heaven. He refers to it, first, as a kingdom. It will be a realm that is under the control of one sovereign. His rule will be the thing that will set it apart from everything else.

Second, the kingdom is eternal. The King James Version uses the word "everlasting," but the word "eternal" is better. Eternal suggests more than just time. It suggests a quality that only God has. It is most inviting in an age like this! When the kingdom of which we are a part on the earth seems to be passing away, it is good to be able to look forward to something that will be eternal. It will stand in sharp contrast to the kingdoms of this world at every point.

Third, the kingdom is yet future, or at least our entrance into it is. While the kingdom is out there even right now, since it is eternal, we must wait a while for our entrance into it. While it is true that we know something of the rule of God in our lives right now through the Holy Spirit, there is a fullness of the rule of God that we will know only in eternity yet to come.

Fourth, it is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is the most blessed truth about heaven. Heaven will be a place in which we will be eternally and wonderfully related to our Lord and Saviour. That will be glory for me! I have meditated on this week. I have never prayed for a President more faithfully than I have for President Carter. This has nothing

to do with who he is, it is just a reflection of what God has done in my life in the last few years. And yet, I really feel for the man. No matter what he does, it just seems to go wrong. I was thinking this week, if I had the authority to replace him with any man in America, who would I choose? Do you know the conclusion I reached? I think no man will ever be able to match the problems of our world--we need Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour. And we shall have Him some day. And thank God, there will be no presidential elections, no two party system in that land. He will be the King eternally to our blessing.

But the emphasis of Peter is not upon the nature of heaven, but rather upon the manner of our entrance into heaven. Peter suggests that there will be a direct relationship between the entrance we are given and the life we have lived here on the earth. "Ministered unto" is a key word. It is the same word translated "add" to your faith back in verse five. The clear implication is that if we are generous in supplying the things needed to grow in our faith, God will be generous with the welcome that He gives us into the eternal kingdom. Indeed, to this word he adds the word "abundantly" or "richly." God will not allow anything to prevent His bestowing honor and glory upon these who have kept on adding to their faith, and have become full grown. Failure to grow will not prevent our going to heaven, but it will negatively effect our enjoyment of heaven.

There are two thoughts that we can receive here. First, the measure of joy we will know as we enter heaven will depend upon the capacity we have developed through spiritual growth. This is true in every realm. As I have led travel groups, it is easy to predict who will get the most out of the trip. You will always find ten giving careful attention to preparation for the trip. They will do some study about the places to be visited and the things to be seen. They will bone up on the history concerning the places. Those who enter heaven with the most joy will be those who have prepared best through spiritual growth.

Another thought is that there will be a measureable reward for spiritual growth. The Bible talks about crowns being given. Our God does believe in a system of rewards. Not everyone will go into heaven equally. Everyone will share a common citizenship, but there will be differences. The differences will be based upon the achievements and the victories known during this life. The life you are living now is best seen as a period of preparation for the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. How will it be? Would it not be wonderful to hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Conclusion:

We must not forget the context of these blessed truths. They are urging upon us the urgency of our giving diligence to the matter of spiritual growth. As you consider your plans for the week just ahead, how much time will you devote daily to growing as a Christian? Do you plan to devote five minutes a day, ten, thirty, or an hour? Unless God intervenes, you cannot expect to devote any time unless you make definite plans for it. There will be time for daily Bible study and prayer only as you plan for it. The day needs to be built around the time you plan to spend with the Lord. This will make a difference in the week, and even a difference in eternity. Let's give attention to growth in the Lord this week!