

A few weeks ago while Alice was talking on the phone with Debbie, Daniel's mother, Daniel asked his mother if he could speak to his grandmother on the phone. When he came on the phone he reminded his grandmother that his birthday was just a week away. When Alice said "Daniel don't you remember that I gave you your birthday gift this summer when we were celebrating Sarah's birthday?" His response was immediate. He said, "Sure I remember that grandmother, but that was a date birthday, and this is my real birthday." You have probably already figured out that Daniel got two birthday gifts from his grandparents this year. The little fellow has already grown to a point in his understanding that he knows the difference between a fake birthday and the real thing.

Everything that lives grows. This is the reason that spiritual growth is a part of the lifestyle of the chosen. In this paragraph that closes the section that discusses the lifestyle of the chosen, Peter calls on us to "crave pure spiritual milk so, that by it you may grow up in your salvation". The cultivation of the appetite are desire for spiritual milk has as its end or goal our growing up in our salvation. We need to give attention to this matter of spiritual growth and see how it is a vital part of the lifestyle of the chosen.

I. The hindrances to spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth is not automatic just as physical growth is not automatic. One reason we are excited about the growth and development of our grandchildren is we know that there are things

that can heed their growth physical, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Peter begins this paragraph by asking us to rid ourselves of something that will hinder our spiritual growth. Without doubt there is someone present this morning who is stunted in their spiritual growth because they have not dealt with one or more of these hindrances to growth that Peter enumerates.

1. Malice

Malice is the common Greek word for wickedness and evil. The word has in it an idea of deep animosity. It could be translated “active ill will”. It is interesting that Peter says that “all malice” is to be put out of our lives. To the degree that you bear within you resentment or ill will toward any person, you are allowing your spiritual life to be hindered. Your ill will is doing you harm while you seek to do them harm. It reminds me of two farmers were having a long bitter feud over a fence line. Overtime the quarrel became more and more heated until finally, undercover of darkness, one farmer went to the other’s well and dump bags of salt into the well to contaminate it. He thought he had really shown his opponent who was in charge. A few days later, tho, when he lifted water out of his own well, he discovered that it had a salty taste. Both farmer’s wells shared a common underground water table. You can’t carry ill will toward another person without doing yourself spiritual harm. It will hinder your spiritual growth.

2. Deceit

The word translated deceit has in it the ideal of catching something with bait. The word used of Jacob in the Old Testament who was constantly deceiving others. It is a matter of practicing trickery, being guilty of conscious deception of others. It could be translated “guile”.

Anytime you are less than open and honest in your relationships with others, you are creating a hindrance in your spiritual growth. Spiritual growth takes place best when we are practicing openness with each other.

3. Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is related to the ideal in the word “deceit”. The word was used by an actor who played a part on the Greek stage. The root ideal in the word as it is used here is “insincerity”. It is a parade of outward conduct intended to impress others. It is making ourselves appear to be something that we are not. Again, any insincerity is going to be an hindrance in your spiritual life. Spiritual growth takes place in an atmosphere of honesty, openness, confession to each other of needs that are a part of our lives.

4. Envy

William Barclay claims that envy is “the last sin to die”. It is translated by some “jealousy”. “Grudges”. The idea in the word is that of trying to take advantage of another. It reflects a bad, unloving attitude toward another person. Unloving attitudes toward others hinder spiritual growth.

5. Slander.

Actually the text says “slander of every kind”. Some have translated it “backbiting”. William Barclay believes that it is the fruit of envy. An unloving attitude toward a person will cause you to use your tongue to run them down, to spread half truths about them with hurtful intentions. It is “defamation of character”.

When you come down to the bottom line there is just one hindrance to spiritual growth that Peter is putting before us. This hindrance to spiritual growth is unhealthy relationships with other persons. You might think that the only thing that could effect your spiritual growth is your relationship with God. While in a sense that is true, it is also true that our attitude toward and relationships with other persons effect our relationship with God. As long as they effect our relationship with God they effect how we grow spiritual. So it is important for us to take a survey of our attitude and actions toward other members of the body of Christ, and even those beyond the body of Christ and if there are any unloving attitudes and actions, then we need to deal with them so that we can enhance our spiritual growth.

II. The means of spiritual growth.

Studies in our generation have confirmed age old understanding that food is important for physical growth. Deficiencies in our diet can have harmful effects on our growth. A balance

and healthy diet produces natural and healthy growth. The same is true in the realm of the spiritual. Our diet is the primary means of our growth. And our diet is to be “pure spiritual milk”.

1. The word of God.

Peter is using a physical symbol for the word of God when he refers to the “spiritual milk”.

Regularly in scriptures the word of God is presented under the symbols of meat, milk, bread, and food. Since Peter uses the analogy of the “new born babe,” he refers to the type of food that babies ordinarily desire, milk. He has been discussing the word of God in the last paragraph of the previous chapter. There we learn that the word of God “living and enduring”. As the living and enduring word of God it is the nourishing word of God. So the means of spiritual growth is the word of God studied, taught, preached, heard and received.

If you have opportunity to thumb through another person’s Bible, you will be able to get a fairly good sense of where they are spiritually. It is obvious that their Bible has been used very little, it likely indicates that their Christian life is stagnant. If it is obvious that their Bible has been much used, there is a likelihood that the Christian is growing spiritually.

2. The word of God received.

Just owning a copy of the word of God does not bring about spiritual growth. It is the reception

of the word of God that brings about spiritual growth. This is the reason that Peter put emphasis on the intense desire for the word of God. He indicates that we are to desire the word of God like a newborn desires the nourishing milk that it receives from its mother. All of us who have been parents are fully aware of the intensity desire of the new born babe for milk. In fact the desire of the baby for milk is so intense that nothing else will satisfy. They expect life to stop until their thirst for milk has been quenched. In fact, they will be insistent on it. If we to grow spiritually we must have the same intents , regular desire for the word of God, This is the means of spiritual growth.

Someone may say, “but pastor I don’t feel any need for regular Bible Study in my life!” I would want to remind you that those who practice medicine tells us that when a person is dying from malnutrition, they have lost all desire for food. It is one evidence of advanced malnutrition. It is really when you feel no desire for the word of God that you need it most. This in itself is a symptom of your need of the word of God. We must give attention to the word of God in our lives and our desire for the word since it is our means of spiritual growth.

III. The goal of spiritual growth.

Peter points us into a direction in his statement, “so that by it you may grown up in your salvation”. This statement gives us the ultimate goal in our spiritual growth. It lets us know why it is urgent that we get rid of the hindrance and we begin to use the means of spiritual growth that God has given to us. This statement gives us some helpful insight into the nature of

our salvation.

He uses the word salvation in its broader, more comprehensive, meaning in this statement.

1. The goal is realizing your full potential in the Lord.

Peter's concern is that we grow spiritually so that the potential that is created by our salvation will be fully realized in our lives. We have already been reminded in this little letter from Peter that when God chose us to be His people that He had some high and Holy purposes in mind. We already become aware also that this new relationship changes the potential in our lives. There is a potential in you because of this relationship with Christ that must be fully realized. If you do not grow spiritually then this potential created by your salvation will never be realized.

2. The goal is the accomplishment of God's purpose in your salvation.

This is closely related to the potential but it relates this goal to God. We will discover something of the purpose of God in our salvation in the paragraphs that follow in this second chapter of I Peter. He sums it up in the statement, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a Holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." "That you may declare the praises of Him" give us insight into the basic purpose of God in our salvation. He has saved us so that we might share a witness in the world and be a witness to the world. His object in our salvation was to bring the light of His gospel into the darkness of the world around us. It is only as we

grow spiritually that his goal will be accomplished. The goal in the spiritual growth is the accomplishment of the purpose of God in our salvation.

It is time to do a little personal appraisal. What is your personal appraisal this morning of your own spiritual growth? Did you ever put a mark somewhere around the house where you could measure your growth status when you were a youngster? You need to put a mark up this morning and measure yourself by it. It is not a question of whether we should be growing but the question is, whether we are growing. Spiritual growth is to be a part of your lifestyle as the chosen all of our days. The last day you live on planet earth should be a day in which you grow a little bit in your Christian life. Your last year needs to be a year of growth. There is no point in the Christian journey in which you can settle in and feel like that you have achieved or arrived.

So take a look at the hindrances, the means, and the goal of spiritual growth. What is your response this morning?