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"HOW CHRISTIANS GROW"

2 Peter 1:5-7

DL LOWRIE

Need: Diligence in growth.

Propositions: If the potential for growth given in the new birth is to be realized, the Christian must exert diligence.

Objective: To stir Christians up to do those things that will bring about growth.

Introduction:

A tiny new born baby is a beautiful sight. Potential is written all over the little one. But a tiny one who is several years old is a special kind of tragedy. All of us have known of little lives that never grew and developed. They did not develop physically or mentally. It always brings a sadness to the heart to see such a one.

Yet such seems to be rather common in the family of God. It is not uncommon to find people who have been born into the family of God, but who have not grown. They have not progressed beyond the point in which they entered into the family of God. At times they may even seem to have regressed. Peter speaks to this situation in our text. After setting forth God's side of our salvation and the Christian life, he emphasizes our side. There is something for you to do if growth is to take place in your Christian life. Let's consider some important lessons set forth here about how Christians grow.

I. THE GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN FOLLOWS THE NEW BIRTH.

Before there can be growth, there must be life, The sequence of birth and growth is set forth in our text. As we have already noticed, the Apostle spoke of the giving of the divine nature in the new birth. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Here we have the impartation of the principle of the divine life. It comes about as we place our faith in the precious promises, as we received that which God has offered in the promises.

But the Apostle adds, "and beside this." The better translation would be "for this very thing or reason. The diligence he calls for in our effort to experience growth in the Christian life is motivated by the fact that we have been made partakers of the divine nature. The connection is clear. Unless you have received the divine nature through the new birth, all efforts to grow as a Christian will be very frustrating. You may grow in your skills at doing religious things, but you will not express the kind of growth this passage calls for. It demands that there be in you divine nature. This divine nature provides the potential to grow spiritually.

II. THE GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMANDS EFFORT.

It is so important that we keep the balance that is found in scripture. There is a danger of becoming off balance if you read the Scriptures selectively. As example if you just read the third verse of this chapter, you might conclude no effort is required in living the Christian life. "According as his divine power hath given unto all things that pertain unto life and godliness." If "all things" are given, it surely doesn't leave anything for us to do. But that is only one side of the truth--just half of the truth. That side of the truth without

our text might lead to many errors in your Christian conduct. While growth is made possible through the divine provisions, there is an effort to be exerted by you.

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith." Diligence is a strong word. It means to approach something with eagerness, with full effort, to do one's best, to really exert one's self. "Giving" means to bring in by the side of. The idea is that we are to bring in right along side the provisions God has provided our full effort. This uncovers the reason that most Christians do not grow. They are too sluggish, too lazy in their approach to the Christian life. Prayer, Bible Study, and deeds of service require effort. They are not diligent in their application of the means of grace. They are negligent of the opportunities for growth that the Lord provides for them.

The other word used by Peter emphasizes the same thing. It is translated in the Authorized Version, "add." "Supply" might be a better translation. While God supplies the mercy and the saving grace that is needed, there is something left for us to supply. We are by our effort to supply certain things to the saving faith with which we began the Christian life. The word was used of a citizen who would be called on by the city to supply the city with a chorus to provide entertainment. It came to be used of supplying something generously, to provide more than is needed. The word surely implies that we are to give more than a minimum effort to this business of growing as a Christian. We are to approach the Christian life with diligence. There needs to be that inner commitment to give our best to becoming the Christian God wills for us to be.

III. THE GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVES TOWARD LOVE.

Before us is one of the great statements in all of Scripture about our Growth. The list begins with faith and ends with love. The list suggests to us progression and movement. It is a growth in Christian character and Christlikeness.

Let us look at the list in some detail and observe the movement. The Apostle begins with "faith." This is a reference to the confidence that we place in the promises of the Lord to inaugurate the Christian life. It is that trust with which we come to God to receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. But the Christian is not to be content with just having faith in the Lord for salvation, he is to give diligence in adding to the faith "virtue." This beautiful word means "moral power, moral energy, vigor of soul." It means here to translate your faith into action. Moral vigor and action are to be supplied to faith. A person will not grow toward the ultimate in the Christian life until their saving faith is activated into other actions. It must become the base from which obedience is rendered to God in every realm.

But then "virtue" needs to have "knowledge" supplied to it diligently. "Knowledge" is "insight, and understanding." It is that discerning knowledge that one gains from the experiences of life. The Christian must never be content with what He knows of the Lord and of His ways. He must ever be supplying knowledge to the actions that his faith takes. Otherwise he will be repeatedly guilty of spiritual blunders. Are you growing in your knowledge of the Lord and of His ways?

"Knowledge" needs to have "temperance" supplied to it diligently. Temperance involves being able to hold all of the passions and desires under control. It refers to that inner self-control which is so important in living the Christian life. The Christian needs to ever be growing in his control of the appetites and desires of the body. This will include the appetite for food, for sleep, the thirst for pleasure and power. Your faith needs to have a full-supply of "temperance" added.

"Patience needs to be added to temperance" diligently. Patience is a strong word. It has in it the idea of steadfastness. It means not to be turned aside by trial or suffering. It is that bearing up under whatever may be placed upon you as a burden. Your faith will prove to

be fruitless, and will never mature into God-like love if you do not develop this patience in your life. So many turn back because of some discouragement that comes. Some adversity takes its toll in their lives. They neglected to add strong patience to their faith.

"Godliness: should be diligently supplied to the "patience." Interestingly God is never described by this word. This is a quality that is found only in mankind. The word can be translated "piety." It refers to that inner attitude that one has toward God-- it is to give to Him the proper respect and reverence that He is due. It is to walk in the "fear of the Lord." It is to practice the presence of the Lord God, to be aware that you are walking "before Him" in all things. Without this, the patience will fail, and the faith will never produce love.

"Godliness" needs a full supply of "brotherly kindness." This means that we are to diligently work at the development of warm, friendly, loving relationships within the family of God. Godliness relates us to God, but this relates us to the people of God. You cannot develop the one without the other. If full grown Christian character is to ever be seen in you, you need a loving, friendly relationship with all of God's children. This is really a family word.

This brings us to the last of the elements to be added. The Christian must never be content with just a good relationship with the family of God. They must seek to move on to full-grown, godly love. Agape-love would include a love which makes God supreme in the life, and a love which moves quickly and sacrificially to meet needs in the lives of others wherever they are encountered. It would include even feeding, clothing, and giving some- thing to drink to your enemy.

The Bible makes clear that in Christian character this is the ultimate. Jesus emphasized that the "love" commandments are the greatest. Paul indicated that "love is the fulfilling of the law." John made it the supreme proof that we are the children of God. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love." So growth in the Christian life is always toward love.

This text leaves us with a question. Where do we get these things we are to supply to our faith? Where do you get the virtue, the knowledge, the temperance, the patience, the brotherly love, the godliness, and the agape-love? Do you find them down inside of your human nature? Where do you find them? Let me make a suggestion. You find them in the same place where you found the faith. Where did you find the saving faith? Was it not a gift of the Lord God Himself to you? Just as God graciously worked to bring about the saving faith in you, He can be expected to provide these other things in the same way. They are among the "all things" we have already noticed. But the point of this passage is that they do not automatically appear in the Christian life. They are supplied as you seek them from the Lord with all of your heart. You will become a person of love only as you set your heart upon the Lord and give your whole life to this goal. As you give yourself, God will supply that which you are unable to supply. This is your part in the growth process.

But let me emphasize again that it is always toward love. If your love for God and your love for others is not growing, you are not growing as a Christian. If you are not growing in your relationships within the family of God, and you are not moving out of yourself to touch others in passionate service, you are not growing as a Christian. Growth is always a growth toward love. All of the other elements are there to make the love possible.

Conclusion:

Does this passage stir you up? Are you concerned about your lack of growth in the Christian life? Let me urge you to take some action tonight.