

**ARE YOU GROWING?  
II PETER 3: 17-18**

**INTRODUCTION:**

As strange as it may seem all of us begin our lives at the same point. Each of us begin life as a new born infant. I've been reminded of the glory of this beginning by the birth of our 10<sup>th</sup> grandchild and 8<sup>th</sup> grand-daughter just a couple of weeks ago. As I held Ashland D'Nell Lowrie in my arms and looked down into her beautiful face it was hard to imagine that her 6' tall, 225 pound, father once nestled in my arms in the same way and yet it was true. Just 28 years ago I could hold Ashland's father in my arms as a new born babe.

It is also true that we each began our spiritual life in the same way. Each of us began as new born babies. We had within us potential for growth but it did not necessarily mean growth would be automatic. There are certain things that are required if growth is to take place in the Christian life. Hope was a major concern of Simon Peter in this second letter. We heard him urging us to add some vital elements to our saving faith in the first chapter. We read the description that he gave of the danger that surrounds us if we do not grow in the second chapter. We will always be vulnerable to false teachers and deceptive leaders if we do not grow in our Christian life. He closes this little letter with the same kind of concern.

The burden of this passage prompts me to ask you "Are you growing?" This is the question we need we need to answer this morning. If the answer to that question is "no" then there needs to be a fresh commitment to spiritual growth in your life. If the answer to the question is "Yes, I

think so,” then there needs to be a fresh commitment to continue that growth. The Christian life is to always be a growing life.

Dr. M. E. Dodd observed, “Conversion is 5% of the Christian life. Growing in Christ is 95% of the Christian life.” Most of us have the 5% taken care of, but we are still working on the 95%. With this concern on our minds let us take a fresh look at this helpful word from Simon Peter.

### **I. GROWTH IS AN OBLIGATION.**

Actually the word we have in our text is a strong imperative urging us to make growth a part of our lives. As an imperative we are to understand it as an obligation. Literally, the verb could be translated like this, “keep on growing.” Growth is to be the continual pattern of the Christian life through out the whole of life.

1. Growth is an obligation because of the nature of the life.

The image of the new born baby and growth that Peter develops in his letters is very helpful to us. It is the nature of things that when a little life is born into the world, it is full of potential. But that potential must be developed through growth. Would it not be a tragic thing if our beautiful little granddaughter, Ashland, would never grow? Would it not be tragic if five years from now she still weighted only 8 pounds and 12 ounces. Would it not be a tragic thing if five years from now she was only 21” tall? Would it not be a tragic if 25 years from now she could not talk or walk? It is the very nature of life that it grows.

All living things grow. It is the law of nature that if there is life there will be growth and development. This means that as a new born Christian you come under the obligation to grow because of the very nature of the life that God places within you. In that life there is the potential tremendous expansion and growth in your walk with God.

2. The growth is an obligation because of the purpose of the life.

God never purposed that Ashland Lowrie would remain a baby throughout all of her life. She was born as a baby so that she could become a beautiful young woman, and hopefully someday the mother of one of our grandchildren. The purpose of God in the giving of human life is always that of growth and development toward a special usefulness. The same is true in the spiritual life. God birthed you into His spiritual family so that you could be strong and useful in the service of the kingdom of God. He birthed you into His family because he has a place of service for you to fill. In order for you to fill that place of service it is necessary for you to grow. So the obligation to grow grows out of the very nature and the very purpose of the life that we have in Jesus Christ.

You must not think of growth in the christian life as an option. It is an obligation. You are under the command of the living Christ to “keep on growing!” You are under this obligation as long as you are in this world. Each day must be a day of spiritual development and progress in your Christian life. Today must be a day of spiritual development and progress in your Christian life.

## **II. GROWTH IS A PROTECTION.**

The apostle was concerned as he wrote this letter about the safety of those new converts scattered out across that ancient world. He warned of the coming of false teachers who would by devious means seek to lead them away from wholehearted commitment to Christ. He knew of the pressures that the culture itself would bring upon them to compromise their walk with God. In order to protect themselves in the kind of society in which they must live, it was expedient that they continue to grow. The dangers around us are as great as those that surrounded those early Christians. Our best protection is to grow as well.

#### 1. Growth is protection against deception.

Your rights, “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lost men.” The error of these lawless men about which Peter is concerned is their erroneous teachings that led to erroneous decisions. He warned about these teachers in that extended section in the second chapter. But how can we protect ourselves against false teachers? How can we make sure we will not be led astray by these misguided souls? The best protection is to continue to grow in Christ and in the things of Christ.

It is disturbing to discover that most of the cultic groups of this country actually grow by attracting members from evangelical churches like ours. Studies indicate for instance that within the Mormon Church today there are literally thousands of former Baptists who made professions of faith in a Baptist Church some where and then later were led into this movement. Why do Christians get sucked into these movements that leads them away from a wholehearted commitment to Christ? Theologians indicate that it is because there is a failure to grow. When

the Christian continues to grow, they will have internal spiritual protection against the external false teachers who come with their deceitful messages.

## 2. Growth protects against falling.

The second statement of concern of the apostle in our text says, “And fall from your secure position. Older translations translate the word “fall from your steadfastness.” The picture that is in this word is that of being pushed off of your foundation. The pressures of life and the persecution of the world has a way of pushing the Christian life off of the foundations on which it is established. This is the concern of the apostle. Steadfastness and stability are built into the Christian life as you continue to grow in the Christian life. Your steadfastness is directly related to your growth and maturity.

All of us could name someone we have known who has fallen off of the foundation of their christian life. If we will do a little close observation we will discover that there was some point in their lives in which they stopped growing. Growing Christians are stable and strong Christians.

Protection comes through growth! This is the burden of our text. This is the will of our Lord! Someone had likened the Christian life to riding a bicycle. You are in no danger of falling as long as you keep moving on the bicycle. The moment the bicycle stops moving you are likely to fall. The same is true in the Christian life. As long as you are moving forward in your spiritual growth you are not likely to fall. The shame and disgrace of falling comes when you stop moving forward.

### **III. GROWTH IS A BLESSING.**

The growth that is to take place in the Christian life is “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.” This points us in the direction of blessing. Christian life that enjoys God’s very best is a Christian life that is continually growing.

#### **1. Growth brings the blessing of grace.**

Grace is used so often in the New Testament that we have become over-familiar with it. We are reminded that the basic idea in the Word is, “God’s unmerited favor or vision.” In this text it represents everything that God provides for the sustaining and fulfilling of the Christian life.

Our growth takes place as we increasingly become aware of how desperately we need the Lord and of how fully He has provided for our need in His provisions. You will remember that in the first chapter of this little letter Peter indicated that God “Has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and goodness.” So it is true that God has made by His power abundant and complete provision for the living of life and development of godliness. However, our appropriation of that sufficient grace comes short of the divine provision of that abundant grace. So day by day in the Christian life we are to increasingly become aware of our inadequacy and His sufficiency. So we should grow in our knowledge of and appropriation of the provisions that God has freely made for the living of life in Christ Jesus.

Most of us started our Christian lives with a lot of enthusiasm and great dreams about the kind of Christian we would become. Some of us were determined to be better Christians than those we had known around us but along the way we began to become aware of just how difficult the

Christian life really is. We became aware that it is not easy to love your enemies. We became aware that the servant mentality is not an easy mentality to maintain. We became aware that going the second mile is more difficult than we had ever imagined. But as we become aware of its difficulty and acknowledge our insufficiency, it is then that we discover the all sufficiency of the grace that God has made available in Christ Jesus. So, as you grow in your Christian life grace becomes more and more as you become less and less.

2. The blessing is in the growing in the knowledge of the Lord.

The other aspect in which we are to grow is in “knowledge” of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” As you would expect the word for knowledge here is the Greek word for personal and experientially knowledge. It is the knowledge that comes out of the interaction of life with life. It is not the knowledge that one gains by reading a book or watching a film. It is the knowledge that comes from knowing a person. The Lord Jesus Christ is an infonaut person. We are finite in our being. This means that none of us can ever know Him fully. We will always in this life know Him “in part.” However, the blessedness of the Christian life is found in growing in our knowledge of Him. I would like to know Him more and more. You will understand Him better and love Him more. And in this understanding and love our lives will be enriched in indescribable ways. If growth is to take place in our Christian lives what can we do? How can I make sure that I am a growing Christian? You know in the physical realm there are at least three vital things that affect growth.

Growth is affected by food. Little Ashland, our new born granddaughter has begun to grow already because the milk that her mother is able to provide her day by day is making this growth necessary. That milk is to little Ashland what the word of God is to each of us. It is milk for the

new born and meat for the developing in the Christian life so we need to regularly and consistently fill our minds and hearts with the truth of the blessed Word if we are to be continually growing.

Fresh air is an essential for growth.

The very atmosphere in which a little life is placed can determine whether or not that life will grow and develop. The fresh air that the new born baby in Christ needs is that of prayer. What oxygen is to the physical life prayer is to the spiritual life. So, if you are serious about growth there needs to be regular daily times in which you come into the presence of God to enjoy His presence in prayer. Some of the prayers will be prayers of thanksgiving. Some of them will be prayers of petition. Some of them will be prayers of intercession. As you spend time with God in prayer you are creating the potential for growth in your Christian life.

Exercise is an essential for growth.

A little life must be allowed the freedom of exercise if it is to grow. There must be movement and utilization of the capacities that God has built into that little body. The same is true in the spiritual life. I can date my spiritual growth in my Christian life to the day I began to take responsibilities in the body of Christ. As long as I just went to church and was a spectator, I grew very little. When I as a teenager began to take responsibility, I began to grow. I began to look for things that I could do in the work of the Lord. Exercise or Christian service is an essential for growth. If you are serious about growth begin to teach a Sunday School Class. If you are serious about growth take a place of ministry at the University Baptist Mission Center. If you are serious about growth, put weekly evangelistic visitation like we are doing in FAITH

in your weekly schedule. If you are serious about growth, take an hour in the Intercessory Prayer Room. If you are serious about growth begin to sing in the choir. Begin to exercise the spiritual gift that God built into you and you will find yourself growing.

Let me leave you with this admonition and all of its urgency – “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” As you do you will join Simon Peter in saying, “To Him be the glory both now and forever! Amen.”