

# Bible Echo

and

## Signs of the Times

"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth." John 17:17

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### **“SPIRITUAL GROWTH” (Page 2)**

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SPIRITUAL growth is a matter of the greatest consequence to professing Christians, for therein lies the secret of final victory in the Christian warfare. It is a trite maxim that "all is well that ends well," and the wise man says, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." The real worth of anything lies, not in its beginning, but in its final outcome. It is not the budding of the rose, but its full bloom, that reveals its beauty and scatters its fragrance. It is not the first appearance of the blade or the blossom that is of value, but the full harvest, the golden fruitage. Likewise it is not the beginning of the Christian life that is of the greatest consequence, but the continuance and end of the same. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end," is a truth of such great importance that we should never lose sight of it. The prize is not given at the beginning, but at the end of the race. Therefore it is not the one who starts the best who is the most certain of the reward. It is he who continues and comes out best at last who will receive the prize.

It is possible to start well and end miserably. Thousands have done this. We are all acquainted with sad cases of this kind. Young men at educational institutions have applied themselves most studiously, and made rapid progress. They gave promise of becoming useful men, and everything betokened a most desirable future; but in time all this was reversed. They came to be vile, dangerous creatures, and ended their days in a most dreadful and wretched state. And we learn from the Scriptures that this has been the sad experience of many who have been connected with the service of God at different periods.

Now the difficulty in all such cases as referred to above, is not in the good start they made at the beginning of their career, but in their course at subsequent times. The beginning was good, but they changed their course. They failed to continue as they started. Had they, continued as they began; perhaps their lives would have been as useful and their end as glorious as the best. In view of such facts, who cannot see the importance of spiritual growth? The apostle Peter thus admonishes the Christian, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 3:18.

It is impossible to remain inactive, to stand still. Action, growth, and development are natural to every living thing. Seeds sprout, grow, and multiply. Tiny sprigs grow into mighty forests. The living creature grows from infancy to

maturity, and increases its kind. Activity, growth, and development are characteristic of the mind of man also. From infancy the mind grows and expands. New thoughts are developed, and knowledge increases day by day. The thoughts developed and the knowledge obtained may not be good and useful; on the contrary, they may be very harmful to ourselves and our associates, but they are nevertheless continually increasing. This law of growth and development throughout nature is so imperative that it can with difficulty be checked. It bears sway over every obstacle except death. And such was the design of the Creator in the beginning.

In spiritual things it is impossible to stand still. We are either gaining or losing in experience. This we know by personal experience, and from the teaching of the Scriptures. We are carefully warned against backsliding, and earnestly entreated to see that we are growing in grace. To show how our loving Father warns and admonishes on this point, a few passages are here transcribed. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." 2 Peter 3:17. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought [margin, gained], but that we receive a full reward." 2 John 8. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Margin, run out as leaking vessels.) Heb. 2:1.

From these passages and many others which we have not space to quote, we learn that although we may have made an excellent start in the service of God, there is great danger that we will fail to continue in the good way, and lose what we have gained. There is danger of gradually and imperceptibly losing the grace of God, as water runs out of a leaking vessel. As long as we remain in this world of sin, we shall have to watch; for we are on dangerous ground. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

On the other hand, our gracious and merciful God invites us to come near to him day by day. "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The degree to which we are to grow in grace is stated by Paul in Heb. 6:1 "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." We are to continue this growth until we become perfect. Just what is meant by growing in grace is made plain in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Here we are instructed to add the Christian graces to our character. This is spiritual growth. Those who do this have this comforting promise: "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." This, then, is the way to keep from falling and make our final victory sure. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." For those who do this, "an entrance shall be ministered . . . abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Of those who fail to do this the apostle says, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

If it be asked, what are the conditions favorable to spiritual growth, or what action is required of us that we may grow in grace? We reply that two things, at least, are necessary to secure healthy Christian growth. These are food and exercise. In this respect the spiritual is very similar to the physical nature. It would be impossible for one to grow physically without food or to become strong without exercise. Deprive the body or any of its parts of exercise, and it becomes weak and feeble, while if deprived of food it soon expires. And so it is with the spiritual faculties. They must have spiritual food in order to live, and exercise to make them strong.

For these necessities God has made every provision. He has supplied the food and prepared the way for all the labor it is possible for us to perform. His word is a great storehouse of spiritual food. It is inspired of God. "Every word of God is pure." "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

As direct evidence that God gave us his word for food to aid spiritual growth, we quote the words of 1 Peter 2:2 : "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Job, one of the greatest of Bible characters, says, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Whether Job had the written word as we have, matters not. He had words from God which he valued more than he did the daily food necessary to sustain physical life. Herein lies the secret of this great man's life. By the word of God he was perfected. How few there are today like Job. How few would go without their regular food before they would allow the day to pass without obtaining from God's word the food necessary to keep up the glow of spiritual life.

Jeremiah was another man whom God loved, and who loved God and his fellow-man with an intensity that we cannot express. On one occasion he had determined to hold his peace and say nothing to those around him, but let them go to ruin if they liked. How he succeeded on this line is stated in Jer. 20 :8, 9: "For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil ; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." He could not refrain from raising a warning voice; for God's word was in his heart, and it was like a mass of fire shut up in his bones. How it got there and burned as it did is revealed in chapter 15:16. He found and ate (studied most devoutly) God's word, and it was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. It gave him right views of God and eternal things. It showed him the value of souls, and filled him with a holy zeal to work for their salvation. The word and Spirit of God are the same today as they were then. They will have the same effect on every heart in which they dwell. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

It is much to be deplored that the Bible is read and studied so little. The most of the sermons preached have but little Scripture in them. They do not give the hearers a love for the Bible; neither do they encourage them to search its sacred pages. As a consequence, it is hardly looked at during the entire week. Business absorbs the mind, and the spiritual nature is left to famish and die. Cold formalism takes the place of earnest heart-religion and godliness, and the great masses are rapidly becoming "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." "From such," says Paul, "turn away."

We do not realize the power there is in the word of God to lead us toward heaven. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jer. 23:29. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Heb. 4:12. But this word will do us no good unless we come in contact with it. It must be read and applied. Its warnings must be heeded; its admonitions must be followed; its promises must be believed and laid hold upon. Then it will produce the spiritual growth necessary to fit us for our duties here and for heaven hereafter.

There are other sources or means of spiritual growth, such as prayer, religious literature, etc.; but these we cannot speak of now. I may speak of these and of the exercise, or labor, required of us, hereafter. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."