



WEEK 1

CHRISTIAN GROWTH



*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”
(2 Peter 3:18).*

Day 1: Growing in Christ

Philippians 1:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:2-5; 1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 3:17, 18

Philippians 1:9. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

10. That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

11. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:2. Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4. So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

5. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.

1 Peter 2:1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2. As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

2 Peter 3:17. 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 stedfastness.

18. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Growing Up

Most people seem to love babies. The baby's parents and siblings love him most and closely watch his progress and growth. The mother may weigh him weekly and measure his length often. If his weight and height steadily increases, everyone is happy.

When a child fails to develop normally, parents become worried. They may take the child to a physician and specialists, doing whatever seems necessary for his welfare. They spare no expense seeking skilled advice, special foods, or expert care.

Parents continue to care about the child's progress as he grows through the years of childhood and adolescence. They see to his training and education. They want him to become strong, self-reliant, and able to take care of himself and do useful work. They want to see him become an honest and mature adult.

What about spiritual growth? A Christian begins new life in Jesus as an infant and grows up into a mature spiritual person. How does this take place?

Thinking Through the Scripture

The Bible compares beginning the Christian life to birth—a new birth from above, from God’s Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” When someone repents and receives Jesus into his heart by faith, a new spiritual life begins. This new life in the Spirit resembles the beginning of a person’s physical life at birth. Certain things must happen if that new life is to survive and grow.

The Apostle Paul had definite expectations of the young Christians at Philippi. Paul usually did not stay long enough at one place to teach new believers everything about the Christian life. He wrote letters to the young churches, giving them advice and help in their problems. His letters are as helpful to us as they were to the believers then.

Paul always prayed for the believers he left behind. He regarded them as his spiritual charges. He told the Philippians about his prayers for them. He prayed that their love would grow continually as they advanced in knowledge and perfect insight. He wanted them to be able to distinguish between what was important and what was not, and he wanted them to be sincere and blameless, ready for Christ’s coming. He prayed that God would fill them with fruits of righteousness for His glory.

Spiritual Maturity. Paul had the same concerns for the believers at Thessalonica. He thanked God that they were growing wonderfully in faith and in love for each other. He rejoiced that, even in the midst of persecution and suffering, they were growing in faith and patience.

Paul didn't say so, but he knew his expressions of joy and thankfulness over their progress would serve to spur them on to further growth.

Peter, also speaking about growth, instructed Christians to get rid of malice, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. These behaviors do not fit the childlike spirit Jesus said His followers should have (Matt. 18:1-4). Peter tells them to be like newborns, whose one desire is milk. He wanted them to desire the pure spiritual milk of God's Word, which would cause them to grow. He suggests that the more they know God and His Word, the more they will want to grow. We must be reading the Bible if we are to grow.

In the last verses of his second letter, Peter commands us to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus. Earlier in the letter, he pointed out some of the dangers surrounding Christians. False teachers, false doctrines, and evil forces oppose the Christian, and he cannot be secure against harm if he is not growing. Our faith depends upon our continual growing in grace and in knowledge. Many religions keep people in ignorance, but Jesus wants believers to grow in knowledge and understanding.

The Heart of the Matter

The initial steps to salvation—repentance and faith—introduce a person into the new life in Christ. From then on, he will be continually growing, progressing to ever-higher goals of experience, knowledge, grace, faith, understanding, and appreciation. To grow spiritually, believers must read and study God's Word, pray and worship God daily, fellowship with other Christians in the church, and submit to Christ in a life of obedience and service. The abundant life Christ came to bring to men is only for those who strive to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus.

Related Ideas

The Law of Growth. “Growth in the Christian life must follow the laws of growth everywhere. A plant in a dark cellar must either die or live a feeble and dying life. It needs light; it needs sunshine. If you live in the dark cellar of your own nature, you will grow more and more feeble until spiritual death comes. If you live in the shadows of doubt, in the dark dens of faultfinding and selfishness, you will lose all the light and joy, and finally the very life of the true believer. Come out into God’s sweet sunshine. Eat the divine manna as given in the divine Book. Exercise all the spiritual sympathies and muscles by following Christ, who ‘went about doing good’ ” (Selected).

Growth in Grace. “The Scriptures speak of the growth of a holy soul as the progress of a ‘shining light.’ It appears on the horizon and gradually ascends to the meridian. They speak of the progress of the racer pressing toward the mark. They speak of the soul’s growth as the growth of the body in passing from infancy to manhood, the whole body, every muscle, bone, limb, and the vital organs, advancing at the same time.

Growth in grace may be compared to the polishing of metals. First we have a dark opaque substance neither possessing nor reflecting light. But as the polisher does his work you see here and there a bright spot, then a strong light, and by and by it sends back a perfect image of the sun that shines upon it. Thus the work of grace begun by the Holy Spirit must go on in our hearts and it will not be completed until the image of God can be perfectly reflected in us” (J. H. White-man).

Growing New Wood. “In Longfellow’s declining years a friend asked him how it was possible for him to keep so energetic and write with such power. Pointing to an apple tree in bloom the poet replied: