

# Spiritual Growth is a Choice

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## INTRODUCTION:

- A. The blessings enjoyed in Christ include not only redemption, but renewal...
  - 1. In baptism, we undergo a "washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit" – **Titus 3:5**
  - 2. From baptism, we rise to "walk in newness of life" - **Romans 6:4**
- B. The renewal we find in Christ involves the concept of spiritual growth...
  - 1. Just as a healthy physical life is one of growth
  - 2. So a healthy spiritual life is a process of growth
- C. Sadly, not all Christians grow spiritually...
  - 1. Many have been Christians for years, with little change or improvement
  - 2. They are no more, often less, useful to the Lord than when they first became Christians
  - 3. Failing to grow, they become stagnant, like a pool of water
- D. That is because "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"...
  - 1. It doesn't happen by default (unlike physical growth)
  - 2. Spiritual growth (like emotional maturity) occurs only when we choose to grow-- If we do not make that choice, and stick to it, there will be no spiritual growth!
- E. To encourage us to make the right choice regarding spiritual growth, consider that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**". . .

## COMMANDED BY GOD

### A. IMPLICITLY STATED IN THE GREAT COMMISSION...

- 1. The Great Commission is found in **Matthew 28:18-20** – “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 **GO** therefore, and **TEACH** all nations, **BAPTIZING THEM** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 **TEACHING** them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ Amen.”

- 2. Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples
  - a. Baptizing them
  - b. Teaching them to observe all things He commanded

**NOTE:** Implicit in the command to teach, is that disciples would be obedient learners. That is, constantly growing as they learned and obeyed their Lord

**B. EXPLICITLY STATED IN THE EPISTLES...**

1. Peter ends his second epistle with a command to grow - **2 Peter 3:18** -“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”
  - a. We are to grow in grace
  - b. We are to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ
2. Peter begins his second epistle describing how we are to grow **2 Peter 1:5-8** – “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your(1) **faith** (2) **virtue**, to virtue (3) **knowledge**, 6 to knowledge (4) **self-control**, to self-control(5) **perseverance**, to perseverance (6) **godliness**, 7 to godliness(7) **brotherly kindness**, and to brotherly kindness(8) **love**. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - a. Adding to your faith such graces as virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc.
  - b. Abounding in these graces, being fruitful, which implies growth
  - c. Christians who did not grow, were sternly rebuked. **Hebrews 5:12-6:1**

**NOTE:** Spiritual growth is a not an option, reserved for a few select Christians. The Word of God commands us to grow! We should also remember that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" that . . .

**REQUIRES DILIGENT EFFORT****A. UNLIKE PHYSICAL GROWTH...**

1. People grow physically by default (unless there is some disorder)
2. No effort is required on our part; we mature physically whether we want to or not

**NOTE:** Don't think that just because you grow older, you are growing spiritually!

**B. SPIRITUAL GROWTH REQUIRES CONCENTRATED EFFORT...**

1. Jesus said it requires labor. **John 6:27** – “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”
2. Paul wrote that it requires work, pressing on. **Philippians 2:12; 3:13-14** – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . . . Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

3. Peter wrote that it requires diligence - cf. **2 Peter 1:5-10** – “– “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your(1) **faith** (2) **virtue**, to virtue (3) **knowledge**,

6 to knowledge (4) **self-control**, to self-control(5) **perseverance**, to perseverance (6) **godliness**,

7 to godliness(7) **brotherly kindness**, and to brotherly kindness(8) **love**.

8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”

C. Like physical health, spiritual growth requires regular exercise.

**1 Timothy 4:7-8** – “But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

**NOTE:** Spiritual growth is not easy. We must work at it. Today. Tomorrow.

Always. But we can take comfort in knowing that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" which is . . .

## **ASSISTED BY GOD**

### **A. WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR EFFORTS...**

1. While we work out our salvation, God is at work in us - cf. **Philippians**

**2:12-13** – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

2. Just as He was with us in producing our new birth. **Titus 3:5** – “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”

3. God desires to complete the work He started when He saved us.

**Philippians 1:6** – “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

### **B. WE ARE STRENGTHENED BY GOD IN OUR EFFORTS...**

1. He strengthens us by His Spirit in our inner man. **Ephesians 3:16** – “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,”

2. He empowers us with unimaginable power that is in us. **Ephesians 3:20** – “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

3. He provides the armor to stand strong in the power of His might.  
**Ephesians 6:10-11** – “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”
4. There is no excuse not to grow, for Christ strengthens us! **Philippians 4:13** – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

**NOTE:** With God as our aid, spiritual growth is possible. And not mediocre growth, but spiritual growth beyond what limits we might think hinder us! Finally, let us remember that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**" that is . . .

## **BLESSED BY GOD**

### **A. THE BLESSINGS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE...**

1. As we grow in grace. **2 Peter 3:18** – ““But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”
  - a. We experience the blessings of the grace in which we stand
  - b. Such as peace with God, rejoicing in hope. **Romans 5:1-2** –“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
2. As we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. **2 Peter 3:18** – “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”
  - a. We experience the blessings of adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. to our faith
  - b. Such as a victorious life, in which we do not stumble so as to fall.  
**2 Peter 1:10** – “– “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;”

**3. Indeed, it is spiritual growth that ensures the "abundant life" now that Jesus promised!** **John 10:10** – “. . . I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

### **B. THE BLESSINGS CONTINUE INTO THE LIFE TO COME**

1. We will experience an "abundant entrance" into the everlasting Kingdom.  
**2 Peter 1:10-11** – “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
2. In some way, our works do follow us. **Revelation 14:13** – “Then I heard a

voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

3. At the very least, we know that our labors will not be in vain!

**1 Corinthians 15:58** – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

## **CONCLUSION**

A. We have been talking about growth; but not just any growth, for not all growth is good...

1. The hearts of some grow dull. **Matthew 13:15** – “For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.” Our Lord can work with those who want to be worked with.
2. The love of many grow cold. **Matthew 24:12** – “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”
3. There is the danger of growing weary in doing good.
  - a. **Galatians 6:9** – “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”
  - b. **2 Thessalonians 3:13** – “But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.”
4. There is possibility of growing corrupt according to deceitful lusts. **Ephesians 4:22** – “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.”
5. There is danger of growing wanton against Christ. **1 Timothy 5:11** – “But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow **wanton** against Christ, they desire to marry,”
  - a. Webster’s definition of “Wanton”
    - one given to self-indulgent flirtation or trifling.
    - hard to control : undisciplined, unruly
    - playfully mean or cruel : mischievous
    - lewd, bawdy
    - causing sexual excitement : lustful, sensual
    - merciless, inhumane <*wanton* cruelty>
    - having no just foundation or provocation : malicious <a *wanton* attack>
    - being without check or limitation: as unduly lavish : extravagant <*wanton* imagination>
  - b. Synonyms for “Wanton” (27 listed)
    - bawdy
    - blue

- coarse
- crude
- dirty
- filthy
- foul
- gross
- gutter
- impure
- indecent
- lascivious
- lewd
- locker-room,
- nasty
- pornographic
- porny
- profane
- raunchy
- ribald
- smutty
- stag
- trashy
- unprintable
- vulgar
- obscene
- X-rated

6. There are those who grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

**2 Timothy 3:13** – But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

7. Like the growth of cancerous cells, the wrong growth can be deadly!

B. We have been talking about spiritual growth, the kind of growth that is . . .

1. **COMMANDED BY GOD**
2. **REQUIRES DILIGENT EFFORT**
3. **ASSISTED BY GOD**
4. **BLESSED BY GOD**

C. It is this kind of growth that Peter enjoined as he closed his epistle.

**2 Peter 3:18** – “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

D. What kind of growth is taking place in our spiritual lives?

1. Is it a deadly kind of growth, creating dull hearts, love that is cold, weariness in doing good, even moral corruption?
2. Or is it a vibrant kind of growth in which we are abounding in love, joy, and peace, being faithful and fruitful in our service to Jesus Christ?

E. **The one kind of growth is often the result of neglect, the other kind of growth comes only when we make the right choice!**

F. If we desire to experience the blessings of the right kind of growth, then never forget that "**Spiritual Growth Is A Choice**"! Are you making the right choice today and every day...?

G. Do you remember this appeal from our Lord? "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." **Matthew 11:28-30**. To do that is a choice . . . A choice to begin that walk with Him . . . A walk that will take

us through life . . . through death . . . through judgment . . . Into Heaven. It all begins with us making a choice.

**B. God's Plan for Man's Salvation**