



LIVING IS GROWING

Quest Lesson A-11

The Problem: When a person receives Christ for the first time he has an experience of joy and excitement that is greater than anything he has ever known. His first love for Christ and the truths of His Word is almost overwhelming.

He was living a life of defeat and disappointment; now he has victory and hope for the future. There is no subject he would rather talk about than his faith in Jesus. The joy has to bubble over, and it does, as he shares with others the wonderful things Christ has done for him.

After a while this new Christian may experience a change. The newness of the life of faith wears off. The truths don't seem as exciting any more. There comes a spiritual doldrum period when prayer and Bible study are not as meaningful as they once were. He finds himself slipping back into the old ways of life. The old places of entertainment look good again, the old associates seem to have something he really needs, and the habits of his pre-Christian days come creeping back. ' He has lost his first love (Revelation 2:4).

Why the change? Why did the most beautiful thing in life gradually lose its lustre? Why did the experience of victory over sin fade away, so that the past way of life took on new attractiveness? Why does the Lord now seem so distant, and the experience of holiness in Christ seem so unreachable and impractical? Why do the old habits come flooding back so that the poor Christian feels like the most degraded hypocrite? Is there any hope for him? Can he regain that which he has lost?

Let us search for the answers in God's Word. We will discover that the Lord can solve this problem. He has the answer, and He will reveal it to us as we study.

Objectives

First, we will study what the Bible says about Sanctification (holiness) as a process of spiritual growth.

Second, we answer the question: Since we have the gift of holiness when we believe, why do we need to grow?

Third, we will consider prayer as a means of growth.

Fourth, Bible study is also an indispensable means of growth.

Fifth, you lose the blessing if you don't share it.

Sixth, the Bible explains how we should handle temptation.

I. Sanctification (Holiness) as a Process of Spiritual Growth

The new Christian we spoke of had a thrilling experience with Christ, but then he stopped growing. The Scriptural message is that you cannot depend today on yesterday's experience. There must be a renewed and vital relationship with Jesus every day. A relationship between husband and wife does not grow unless they communicate and express their love in various and meaningful ways. Nor does our relationship with the Lord grow stronger and more enduring unless we cooperate with His efforts to foster it every day.

The Word

1. How did the Apostle Paul express the Lord's wish that we grow spiritually? 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 4:3.
2. What progressive work does the Lord do for the church and for each of us individually? Ephesians 5:26-27.
3. How did Peter express the need for us to grow spiritually? 2 Peter 3:18; (compare 2 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 6:1; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 9:10).

Explanation: The message is that we can experience more and more of the love of Christ, more and more of his holiness and power. There is no such thing as a stationary Christian. You are either growing more and more like Christ, or you are falling back spiritually. Growing in grace is the process by which the spiritual blemishes are being eliminated, and the Lord is washing away the "spot, or wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:27), so that you will enjoy untarnished holiness.

Relevance: The falling back experience does not have to occur. Christ's plan is that we will grow stronger and stronger in Him.

II. Since We Have the Gift of Holiness When We Believe, Why Do We Need to Grow?

Although the Christian believer receives the gift of Christ's righteousness or holiness bestowed upon him, he still retains fallen human nature. This fallen self, worked on by Satan, is the source of the tendency to turn away from God. The only way for that tendency to be subdued every day is for the believer to receive a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit every day.

The Word

4. What constant struggle with his fallen humanity did Paul experience? 1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5: 6-17.
5. What counsel are we given in regard to subduing the desires of our fallen humanity? Colossians 3:5-10.
6. How only can the natural desires be subjugated? Romans 8:11-14.

Explanation: When a person first believes in Jesus, he is given the righteousness or holiness of Christ by the Holy Spirit. At that moment eternal life begins (John 3:36), and he is qualified for heaven. The thief on the cross enjoyed the blessings of sanctification at the moment of belief. Yet, if he had gone on living, he would have had the same daily struggle with his fallen humanity that we have. He would have had to grow spiritually by learning to rely consistently upon Christ's power instead of upon his own ability to overcome. Sanctification as growth is the process by which we learn to depend every moment on Jesus and His gift of the Spirit, rather than trying to fight the devil and our fallen humanity in our own strength. As we depend daily upon Christ we grow spiritually stronger, because His power consistently received is the source of victory over our fallen self and our tendency to sin.

Relevance: Sanctification is the gift of present holiness in Christ, but it is also the growth process made possible by our daily receiving new outpourings of the gift. The Bible presents the most exciting paradox; you enjoy present holiness and salvation in Christ, but you are also growing in holiness so that you are becoming more like Jesus, If you were to die, as the thief on the cross did, shortly after receiving Christ's gift, you would be saved. If you live on, the Lord makes available the power for continual spiritual growth. Living as a Christian is growing spiritually. If you stop growing, you begin to die, and the old thoughts and ways begin to reassert themselves.

III. Prayer as a Means of Growth

The Bible emphasizes and reemphasizes that it is only possible to maintain a relationship with the Lord as we speak to Him very often and quite regularly.

The Word

7. What instruction are we given on the importance of much prayer? 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:15 Matthew 26:41; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Romans 12:123 Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:7.

8. What did Jesus say about the importance of praying in private? Matthew 6:5-6; (compare Mark 1:35 6:46; Luke 6:12).
9. Under what conditions will the Lord always answer our prayers? John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15.
10. How important is it that we exercise faith as we approach the Lord in prayer? Hebrews 11:63; James 1:5-7; Mark 11:24.

Explanation: It is always the Lord's will to renew our Spiritual strength. We can ask for that confidently, and with the assurance that we will be heard and answered. Selfish requests will not be granted. As we surrender to the Lord, we are willing to say as Jesus did, "not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). When we come to the Lord in prayer, we may ask for some material advantage. Because we don't get exactly what we ask for does not imply that the Lord is not with us. He may see that we are better off without that material thing. But never is there the slightest doubt that requests for spiritual life and power will be answered. When we come humbly and with genuine trust in Him, the Lord grants us the grace to grow spiritually. We have the gift of His holy presence as the means of present holiness and progressive growth.

Relevance: Do you pray often to the Lord Jesus? He wants to commune with you on a regular basis.

IV. Bible Study as a Means of Growth

God speaks to us through His Word. If you wrote a letter to a friend and he did not bother to read it, you would be hurt. Imagine how the Lord feels when we neglect to read the special strengthening messages which He has given through Bible prophets.

The Word

11. How did Jesus say we would be sanctified? John 17:17-19; 15:3.
12. How did the Psalmist indicate that spiritual cleansing takes place? Psalm 119:9-11.
13. What does attention to the entire Scriptures do for our spiritual life? 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:2.

Explanation: Sanctification, purification, growth in good works, and progress toward total victory are greatly contributed to by our earnest, daily study of the Scriptures. We do not earn Christ's gift of holiness by our Bible study. His gift is free to the person who believes in Him. But His Word is used by the Holy Spirit as a means of fortifying our minds against evil, and instructing us in the life of purity and holiness. Satan and his demons are forced to flee when we come to the Word in faith. As we study, our understanding grows. Things that were once mysteries become clear to us, and our love for the Lord and His ways is mightily increased. Then when the tempter comes, as He did to Jesus (Matthew 4), we are able to answer with a "Thus saith the Lord."

Relevance: Have you begun a program of daily Bible study? If you have a set time when you study and pray, you are more likely to be consistent. There are great blessings waiting for you!

V. Sharing Our Faith as a Means of Growth

Someone has correctly stated, "A witnessing Christian is a growing Christian." And, of course, the opposite is true. If you hoard the truths of God's Word in your heart and refuse to give them to others, before long you will become as stagnant as the Dead Sea. When the water of life flows in, it must also flow out if you are to become a vibrant, radiant Christian.

The Word

14. If we speak to others on Christ's behalf, what will He do for us? Matthew 10:27, 32-33.
15. What is Jesus' great commission for every believer? Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8.
16. What invitation are we to give as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit? Revelation 22:17.

Explanation: If Jesus were willing to give up heaven to visit our world and minister to us, surely we can give time and effort so that others can enjoy the blessing of salvation that we enjoy. It is inevitable, as Jesus pointed out, that we will be a blessing to others if we know Him ourselves. "He! who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38 RSV; compare Isaiah 12:3). It is impossible to know the love of Christ and not share it with others. And the sharing reacts upon our own souls. We come very near to the Lord as we join Him in inviting others to come.

Relevance: Are you growing spiritually as you witness to others? The whole world needs to know what you know.

VI. Resisting Sin and Submitting to God

A vital part of growing spiritually is the process by which we overcome temptation. Even the most faithful Christian, who prays often, studies the Bible regularly, and witnesses to others, will be confronted by Satan's fierce temptations. In fact, the devil will try harder to destroy such a person because he is a threat to his demonic kingdom. How do we overcome temptation? How do we refrain from doing those things which we know are wrong, but which we really enjoy?

The Word

17. What are two steps we must immediately take in overcoming temptation? James 4:7-8.
18. What power does the Lord promise to give enabling us to overcome? 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18; Jude 14.
19. When we have asked for power to overcome a temptation what is the very next thing we should do? Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20; Hebrews 13:18.

Explanation: When we are confronted by a temptation to sin we should do three things:

1. Pray to the Lord like this: "Dear Lord I am helpless! I like this thing, but I don't want to do it. Without your help I will fall."
2. Ask for strength to overcome: "Lord please give me the victory. I will resist, but you must overcome Satan for me. You promised. Now I claim your promise."
3. Give thanks: "Thank you Lord, I believe you have given me the power to overcome this. Thank you! I praise you!"

Those three prayers can be prayed silently in a moment when you are tempted. The third one is very important because praise is faith. When you go on asking but don't thank God for answering, you are not exercising faith. When you ask and thank Him for the answer, even before you experience, it, that is faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Our wills are not enough to overcome the evil one. Paul said, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Romans 7:18 RSV). What was the answer to his problem? He says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). We must understand that our resistance is necessary (James 4:7-8; Hebrews 12:4). God expects us to use our wills and resist sin. But our resistance alone will never overcome Satan. Only as we pray and submit by faith to Christ is the devil driven away and we have deliverance.

Relevance: We grow in holiness as we experience progressive victory over sin. No sin has to overcome you. "He is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24) is a wonderful promise. No temptation is too much for the Lord to conquer for you (1 Corinthians 10:13). Your life can be a series of uninterrupted victories. There can be constant growth in holiness. The gift of the Holy Spirit to your heart daily is your present holiness in Christ. The daily gift makes spiritual growth a certainty for you. Jesus urged, "Abide in me... for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15: 4-5). Sanctification is now, but it is also progressive growth. Praise the Lord, we are in His hands now, and drawing ever nearer to Him, so that very soon when He comes we will be with Him and with one another for eternity.

Have you found the sanctifying presence of Jesus in your heart?

Are you willing to submit your life entirely to Him so that you can grow spiritually stronger and stronger?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The thief on the cross was a sanctified Christian.
 - b. We enjoy the blessings of sanctification even while we are growing.
 - c. Bible study earns the blessing of God.
 - d. Our wills are strong enough to overcome Satan.
2. Discuss: If no temptation is too strong for the trusting, dependent Christian, he can be an overcomer as Jesus was.