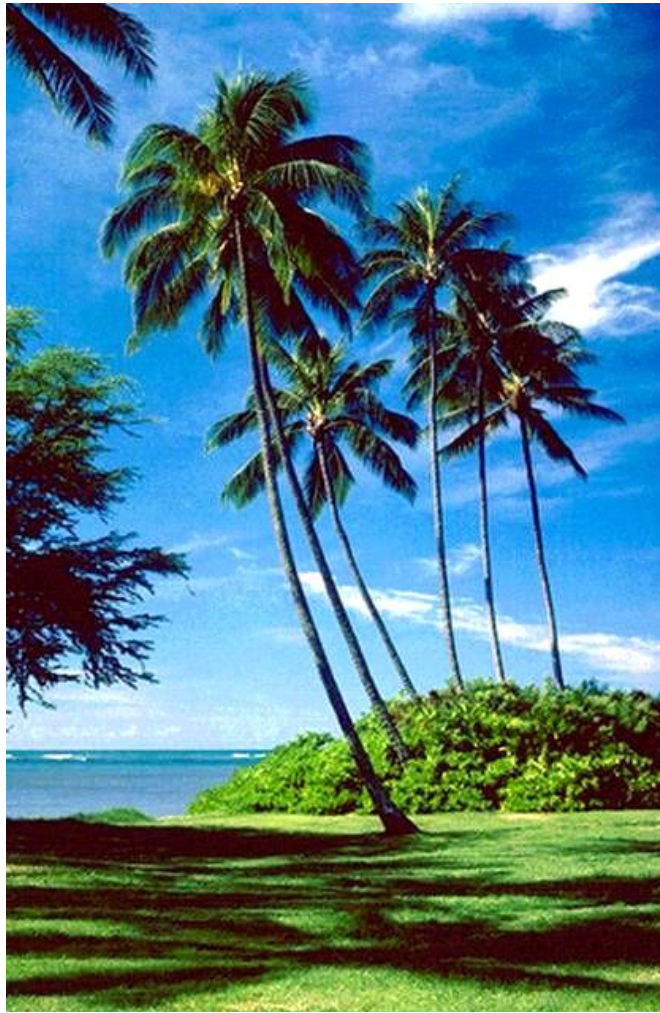


SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PART IV



by
Evangelist Norman R. Stevens

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Part 4

Please open your Bibles to II Peter chapter three and verse eighteen. I would like to preach a message entitled "Spiritual Growth – Part 4."

We are going to look at three more things that will help you grow in Christ and live a balanced Christian life for the Lord.

However, before we do that we must hear the gospel one more time. And by the way, you ought not to be tired of hearing the gospel. If it is believed it will transform hell bound sinners lost and without hope into the children of Almighty God.

The Gospel is a blessed story. It is a blessed truth. The Bible says that you are without hope, that you are without God. You are dead in trespasses and sins. In Ephesians 2:1, the Bible says, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

There is nothing in your power to save you. Nothing! God looks upon man in his lost condition and says, man cannot do anything to save himself so I will transfer all of man's sin guilt to my Son who does have the ability to pay a sin debt. I will transfer all of man's sins to Jesus Christ. In II Corinthians 5:21, the Bible says, "For he [God] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." God transfers all your sin to Christ, and then God pours out His entire wrath upon Christ in full measure.

So let me ask you something! How could one man suffer an infinite penalty for all of humanity? How could that be? Because that Man is also God. And Jesus Christ bore your sin and did what only God could do. He paid the infinite price. And God says, My holy nature is satisfied, My justice that cries "sin be punished" is satisfied. I am satisfied. I don't have to judge anybody else. Believe on My Son; and if you will accept what He has done, I can forgive you without ever one time compromising My holiness. That's a beautiful truth. How could anyone ever imply that his good works have anything to do with that? In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." In Titus 3:5, the Bible says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

There is something in man that says, that's too easy. That's pride!

In Ephesians 2:4-5, the Bible says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)."

God is a God of great wrath. God is a God of dreadful justice. But aren't you glad He is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us? I don't understand that. He did not just like us, He loved us. In John 3:16-17, the Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

God did not just love us. It was a great love. He was willing to give up His only begotten Son that through His death you could have eternal life by simply believing on Christ.

Listen folks! The whole race was doomed and damned to hell; but God, in His grace, has chosen to save all those that believe.

In Acts 16:31, the Apostle Paul said, "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." In John 6:47, Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." In John 1:12, the Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Simply believe on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead.

In Romans 10:9-10, the Bible says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In Romans 10:13, the Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

And by the way, you must be saved if you are going to grow spiritually. In I Corinthians 2:14, the Bible says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

What is the Bible saying? It is simply saying this. The natural man does not grasp, comprehend, or understand spiritual truth because spiritual truth is spiritually discerned.

That's the natural man. He needs to be saved in order to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth.

You say, "Preacher! What must I do to be saved?" Simply admit that you are a sinner; and believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Saviour. You will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith. In I Corinthians 15:3-4, the Bible says, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the

scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you some 2,000 years ago on Calvary’s cross. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him more than to save you today so that you can begin to grasp, comprehend, and understand spiritual truth so you can grow spiritual thereby. And with that you will receive forgiveness of all your sins, eternal life, and a home in heaven when you die.

My friend! If you are going to begin to grow spiritually today you need to be saved. It is that simple.

Brethren! Please notice II Peter 3:18, the Bible says, “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.”

Let me ask you something. Are you maturing? Are you growing? Are you moving forward in your spiritual growth? As a child of God you ought to be. You ought to be maturing. You ought to be growing. You ought to be moving forward in your spiritual growth. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were when you first got saved. You ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were a year ago, a month ago, a week ago. As a matter of fact, you ought to be further along in your spiritual growth than you were just yesterday.

Brethren! The best way to grow in Christ and live a godly Christian life for the Lord is to develop good daily habits. The problem with most Christians today is that they have bad habits. Another problem with most Christians today is that they don’t want it to cost them anything to grow spiritually.

Don’t you want to grow in Christ and live a godly Christian life for the Lord? Sure you do!

We have already looked at five good habits that will help you grow spiritually if you will do them consistently. What were they? First, you are to go to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open that you might grow in Christ.

Second, you need to read, meditate, memorize, study, and apply God’s Word to your life through obedience.

Third, you need to pray every day. If you were sold on prayer, you would rarely stop the act of praying. If you truly believe that God Almighty would give you everything that you asked for, you would rarely stop the act of praying.

Fourth, you need to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ every day. America is going to hell and God’s people sleep. I am simply saying this. It is not right that you go to heaven and not take others with you.

Fifth, you need to praise the Lord regardless of your circumstances and situations. Do you allow circumstances of life dictate how you are going to act? If you do, you are no different than the world. The world acts the very same way. And you ought not to be acting like the world.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience, pray every day, share the gospel with others, and praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life.

But notice number six: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of yielding your life to Christ.

God did not save you that you might live for yourself and do what you want to do. The Bible is very clear on this. In II Corinthians 5:15, the Bible says, "They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." That is one of the clearest passages in all the Word of God which shows that God did not save you that you might live for yourself and do what you want to do, but that you might live for Christ.

In Romans 6:6, the Bible says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." You ought not to be serving the old sin nature that you have that you were born with. You ought to be serving the Master. You ought to be serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Your body is not your own to do with as you please. In I Corinthians 6:19-20, the Bible says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." In I Corinthians 10:31, the Bible says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

God did not save you that you might live for yourself and do what you want to do. Why then did God save you? God saved you so that you might live for Christ, that you might do the will of God, that you might glorify God.

You say, preacher! How can I do that? How can I live for Christ? How can I do the will of God? How can I glorify God? How can I magnify God with my life? How can I be used of God? The answer is found in Romans 12:1-2, where the Apostle Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Don't you see? You can be what God wants you to be as you yield your bodies a living sacrifice to God, not as a dead sacrifice, but as a living sacrifice, dead indeed unto sin, dead indeed to living for yourself.

When you yield your bodies a living sacrifice to Christ, you are dedicating yourself to God. You are setting yourself apart to God. This is a simple reminder that everything that you possess belongs to God. Every ability that you have, every spiritual gift that you possess, every talent that you have--it all belongs to God. Your life, your dreams, your plans, your ambitions, your goals, your children, your family, your car, your house, your time, your money, your body--it all belongs to God.

For example, you need to give your mind to God. In Philippians 4:8, the Bible says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." You need to give your mouth to God. In Ephesians 4:31-32 the Bible says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

You need to give your eyes to the Lord. In Psalms 101:3, the Bible says, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes..." You need to give your ears to God. You need to give your hands to God.

What was Paul saying? He was saying this. Brethren, you have not been saved to please yourself. You have not been saved to do what you want to do in this life. You have been saved to yield your bodies a living sacrifice to God, totally dedicated to God in every single way so that God is well-pleased, totally given over to God, seeking only to please God because that is your reasonable service.

Are you yielded to Christ? As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you ought to be. You ought to be yielded to Christ if you want to live for God, do His will, and magnify Him with your life. And in so doing, you will be able to live a godly consistent Christian life for the Lord.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience, pray every day, tell others about Jesus Christ, praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life, and yield your bodies a living sacrifice to God, totally dedicated to God in every single way.

But notice number seven: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of performing those vows you have made to God every day.

If you promised God you would do something make sure you do it. Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would serve Him if He would help you get out of your financial troubles? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would serve Him if He

would help you get out of the South Pacific; if he would help you get out of the jungle in Vietnam; if he would help you survive the desert in Iraq? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would go to church faithfully? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would have devotions and quiet time with the Lord every day? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would study the Word of God? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would have family devotions? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would go to the mission field? What happened?

Do you remember the day you promised the Lord you would prepare for the ministry? What happened?

In Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, the Bible says, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."

You say, Preacher! What should I do? It's very simple. Do what you promised. If you promised the Lord to serve Him then do it. If you promised the Lord you would have family devotions do it. If you promised the Lord you would go to the mission field do it. If you promised the Lord you would prepare for the ministry do it. What every you promised the Lord do it. It's that simple.

You say, Preacher! I don't remember the things I promise the Lord I would do so I can just forget about doing them right? No, that's not right, you cannot just forget the things you promised the Lord you would do and think every thing is just fine. What you need to do is ask the Holy Spirit of God to help you remember the things that you promised the Lord you would do and then write them down on a piece of paper and discipline yourself to do them.

So if you want to grow in Christ and live a consistent Christian life for the Lord, you need to discipline yourself to be in church every day the doors are open, read the Word of God and apply it to your life through obedience, pray every day, tell others about Jesus Christ, praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life, and yield your bodies a living sacrifice to God, totally dedicated to God in every single way, and perform those vows you have made to God every day.

But notice number eight: the best way to grow in Christ is to develop a good habit of confessing and forsaking all known sin in your life every day.

So let me ask you something. What keeps you from maturing? What keeps you from growing spiritually? Is there a sin in your life that keeps you from maturing? Is there a sin in your life that keeps you from growing spiritually? Listen folks! Whatever sin keeps you from maturing; whatever sin keeps you from growing spiritually, it is keeping you locked into carnality, and you don't have to live that way. You say, Preacher! What must I do? You need to confess and forsake all known sin in your life. In I John 1:9, the Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And with that in mind, don't go on in your sins against the Lord. In Proverbs 28:13, the Bible says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." In Ezekiel 18:30, God says, "Therefore I will judge you, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."

The word "repent" means to change, to change your mind, to change your mind about your sin, to change your way of living, to change your lifestyle. In other words, repentance is a change of mind leading to a change of direction. Do you see the progression here? There is something in your life that is not right. You deal with it.

By the way, confess sin by its right name. Don't say, God please forgive me of my shortcomings. Don't say, please forgive me of my wrongdoings. What's that? You say, Preacher! That's confession. No its not. True confession sounds something like this. Lord, I lied today. Lord, I cheated on my test today. Lord, I lusted today. Lord, I was proud today and that's wrong. I confess it as sin. Please forgive me.

Confess sin as soon as you do it. Don't wait to you go to bed at night. If you wait until then you will have forgotten and you will say something like this. Please forgive me of my shortcomings.

Remember to confess sin by its right name and don't excuse yourself. Say Lord, I was angry. Please forgive me. Lord, I was jealous. Please forgive me. Lord, I was bitter. Please forgive me.

I submit to you that the best way to grow in Christ is not to be content to live with any sin in your life. When you discover sin in your life; when you find inconsistency in your life, you deal with it. Why? So you can move forward in your spiritual growth.

You will never find the spiritual Christian shrugging his shoulders saying, "That is just the way I am." You will never find the spiritual Christian doing that. That's the mark of carnality. The spiritual Christian says, "That may be the way I am; but, by God's grace, I am not going to stay that way."

Now that you are right with God, now that you are in fellowship with the Lord, the second thing you must do is judge sin in your life. You must not allow sin to tell you what to do or what not to do as a child of God. You need to take a strong stand against sin. In Romans 13:14, the Bible says, "Make not provision for the

flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." In Philippians 3:3, the Bible says, "Have no confidence in the flesh." What am I saying? Please take your Bibles and look at Romans chapter six and verse one. Do you want to live a victorious life over the old sin nature that you have, so that you sin not presumptuously against the Lord? In this text is the secret to living such a victorious life over sin. Notice the question Paul asked in verse one. In Romans 6:1, Paul writes, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" What was Paul saying? Paul was simply saying this, "Why don't we just go on sinning that grace may abound?" Now, when Paul is talking about sin here, he is talking about the rule and reign of the old sin nature that you have. You could ask the same question this way, "Should we remain under the dominion of the old sin nature that grace may abound? Should we remain under the controlling power of the old sin nature that grace may abound? Should we remain under the rule and reign of the old sin nature that grace may abound?" That's the question. Notice the answer he gave in Romans chapter 6 and verse two. "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

What was Paul saying? Paul is saying this, "For the child of God to remain under the dominion of his old sin nature is not right. For the child of God to remain under the controlling power of his old sin nature is not right. For the child of God to remain under the rule and reign of his old sin nature is not right." God has by His own power delivered us from the ruling power of sin once and for all, and the Bible makes that very clear to us in Romans 6:11-14. It says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you."

You can clearly see from this passage of Scripture that God's promise to you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is that sin shall not have dominion over you. You no longer have to stay in sin. You no longer have to stay under the bondage of sin as a child of God. If you do, you choose to do it. Because you have been set free, you have been set free from the dominion, from the controlling power, from the rule and reign of the old sin nature once and for all, because of this, if you stay under the bondage of sin, then you choose to do so. You have not been set free from its presence, but from its power to rule and reign in your life. You have a new nature. As a child of God, you have the very presence of the Holy Spirit of God living in you. Therefore you have the power to turn off the old sin nature that you have.

Listen folks! When a Christian recognizes the fact that he is no longer under the bondage of sin, when he recognizes the fact that he is no longer under the dominion of his old sin nature, when he recognizes the fact that he is no longer to stay in sin, he can then begin to live a victorious life over sin. He can then begin to live a victorious life over his old sin nature that he has, so that he sins not presumptuously against the Lord.

Do you truly want to grow in Christ? Are you willing to pay the price? Are you willing to make the sacrifice in this life to grow to spiritual maturity? Are you willing to discipline yourself to do these eight things?

You say, Preacher! What must I do to grow spiritually? It is very simple. You need to develop good daily habits. Eight good habits that will help you grow spiritually if you will do them consistently are going to the ministry of the local church every day the doors are open, reading the Word of God and applying it to your life through obedience, pray every day, tell others about Jesus Christ, praise the Lord every day no matter what might take place in your life, yield your bodies a living sacrifice to God, totally dedicated to God in every single way, perform those vows you have made to God every day, and confess and forsake all known sin in your life every day.

How is a Person Saved?

Salvation is all of God. God does the saving. Just take God at His Word and claim His salvation by faith. You will never be able to work your way into heaven. God does not have a scale in heaven whereby He weighs your good and bad works. That is a lie of the Devil – Romans 3:24; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:18; Romans 5:8.

Salvation is as simple as believing on Christ as the one who bore your sin, who died in your place, who was buried, and whom God resurrected from the dead – John 1:12, 3:16, 6:47; Acts 16:31; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 10:13.

Simply admit that you are a sinner and believe on Christ as your crucified, buried, and risen Saviour. You will receive forgiveness for all of your sins. You will receive His free gift of eternal life by faith – Romans 3:10, 23; I Corinthians 15:3-4.

Jesus did a wonderful thing for you some 2,000 years ago on Calvary's cross. He died for you. He was buried for you. He rose again the third day for you, and nothing would thrill Him more than to save you today.

Won't you go to Him right now in prayer and tell Him in your own words that you will trust Him as your Saviour? Or pray this simple prayer: Dear Lord, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for me and that He arose from the grave. Here and now I ask You to forgive me of my sin and save me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

If you prayed that simple prayer, I would like to hear from you. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (813) 760-4028.

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