Obedience, Prayer, and Proclaiming the Word
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1389

This message was preached in 1986.

We've been having a great time studying together the subject of spiritual growth, and nothing, frankly, is more important in the life of a believer than that the believer be involved in the process of spiritual maturity. It would be a very tragic thing for a Christian to stay in a state of infancy for all of the years of his life on earth, and yet, sad to say, that's exactly what happens in many, many cases. Churches are filled with people who never really grow up spiritually. It seems as though as the years go by, they fight the very same battles in the very same way and wind up losing them in the very same manner that they've lost them in the past. They don't seem to be strengthened. They don't seem to be gaining any resources. They don't seem to be ascending any kind of a ladder of spiritual progression which gives them a greater sense of victory, a greater usefulness to God.

And this is the tragedy of a sort of a retarded spiritual growth progress. And we want to deal with that by sharing the principles of the Scripture that really point us in the direction of spiritual maturity.

Now we assume that God wants us to grow. We don't need to assume it specifically. We can know it specifically, because 2 Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in grace." And 1 Peter 2:2 says we are to "desire the milk of the word that we may grow." So growth is really commanded. We are told to grow up. Paul says, "Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine." We are to mature. We are to grow. We are to progress in our Christian lives.

Yesterday should be one thing, today should be something else, and tomorrow should be something again. In fact, I've often felt in my life that any day that I don't grow at least a little bit in progress toward Christlikeness is a total loss. There ought to be in each day some element of progress in my spiritual life.

Now we've talked about some of the ways in which we grow spiritually. But we've said over all there is a master key to spiritual growth, and it is this. We grow as we glorify God. We know what it means to glorify God now because we've studied it in our past four sessions. And generally we understand that it means to live to His honor, to live to His praise, as Paul says to Titus, "to adorn the doctrine of God." As Jesus said, to so live that we literally bring honor to the Lord. We shine as lights in the world, and the Father thereby is glorified. Living to God's glory, then, is living the kind of life that manifests godliness, that puts God on display, that reveals Christ in our lives.

And this is really the state in which we grow spiritually. If we are not living to the glory of God, the only other alternative is we're living to self-glory or the glory of Satan. And in either of those two latter conditions, we don't grow at all. Only as we live to the glory of God do we grow, and our key verse is 2 Corinthians 3:18, which says, "As we with an unveiled face - " in other words, we have clear vision " - behold in a mirror the glory of the Lord - " and that mirror is the Word of God that reflects it to us " - as we gaze at the glory of the Lord, - " now mark this " - we are changed into his image from one level of glory to another." In other words, we begin to ascend a level of glory at a time, to more and more be like Jesus Christ, as we gaze at His glory.

The focus, then, of the Christian life is to really know God and glorify Him. This is the expression of Paul when he says, "that I may know him." So the believer, then, if he is to grow, has a focus, and the focus is the glory of the Lord. And as he loses himself in the glory of the Lord, he begins to grow.

Now very practically speaking, we have learned that that means several things. First of all, we glorify God by confessing Jesus as Lord. In Philippians chapter 2 it says that we are to "confess Jesus *as* Lord, to the glory of God." Now let me sum it up very simply. If we are to grow, we will grow as we glorify the Lord. We will go from one level of glory to the next. We will proceed from being babies, to being young men, to being spiritual fathers only as we glorify God, only as we live in His glory, as we honor Him with our life.

That means, first of all, that we must confess Jesus as Lord. You can't live to the glory of God unless you're born again, unless you're a believer, unless you have given your life to Christ. That's what Paul is saying. And if I can just remind you of another thing that we discussed it is this, that becoming a Christian is not primarily to keep you out of hell, not primarily to let you experience blessing, but becoming a Christian is primarily so that you can live to the glory of God, because that's why He made you.

It's always interested me that most everything that God made gives Him glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God," "the beast of the field gives Me glory," says Isaiah. The angels said, "Glory to God in the highest." But it's amazing how humans resist giving glory to God. In fact, in Romans 1 it says, "When they knew God, they glorified *Him* not as God." It is the terrible legacy of human sinfulness that man doesn't give God glory. Thus man never progresses spiritually.

Now, when we invite Christ into our lives, when we confess Him as Lord, when we acknowledge Him as Savior and Master, then is the birth that begins the progress of spiritual growth. Now how do we grow spiritually once we're saved? Well, there's a second way. We grow spiritually as we aim our lives at that glory. In other words, we're saved, and that acknowledges God, and then we aim our life - that is everything we do - at glorifying God.

The verse we used is 1 Corinthians 10:31 and it says, “Whatever you do, whether you eat, or drink, do it all to the glory of God.” And eating and drinking is the most mundane thing there is. The little, simple things of life like eating and drinking are to be done to the glory of God. Now listen, as you live your life that way, doing everything to the glory of God, you will feel in your own life the power of the Spirit of God moving you along the line of maturity.

Now we shared some other things, as well. There’s a third element in glorifying God that gives us growth, and that is confession of sin. In Joshua 7:19 it says, “Make confession of sin and give glory to God.” We glorify God by confessing sin. We saw also that we glorify God by trusting Him. It says in Romans 4:20, Abraham “was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” So as we confess Jesus as Lord, as we aim our life at His glory, as we confess our sin, and as we trust God, we are giving Him glory; and in response, He is pulling us in a spiritual magnetism toward Christlikeness.

We saw also in our previous studies that there is a fifth way we glorify God, and that is that we glorify Him by our fruitfulness. In John 15:8 it says, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” We also saw we glorify God by praising Him. In Psalm 50:23 it says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.” So we’ve seen, then, at least six ways in which we practically glorify God, and in each of those areas as we give ourselves to that we will be maturing.

There’s no big secret to this. There’s not some divine zap. There’s not some little special deal that happens. You don’t all of a sudden go over some kind of a clicker and you’re really there. There is this constant steady pace of growth that occurs in our lives as we are giving God glory. And by the way, that’s synonymous with walking in the Spirit, living in the Spirit, obeying the Word of God, letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. All of that is synonymous. As we are abandoned to God, yielded to the Spirit, submissive to the Word, we are giving Him glory. That means in our confession of sin, in our trust in Him, in our fruitfulness, in all of those areas, we are yielding to His glory.

Now I want to add another point for our study tonight and that is this, a seventh way in which we glorify God. We glorify God by loving Him enough to obey Him. We glorify God by loving Him enough to obey Him. I want you to turn with me to John chapter 21, John chapter 21. Now this is a very important point and it’s one that we’ve touched on briefly in a previous point, but I want to stress it because I think obedience is so very important.

In fact, if I could simplify the Christian life to one word it would be the word “obedience,” and by that word I don’t just mean external obedience, but I mean the spirit of obedience, the heartbeat of obedience. Unlike the little girl who was standing up, you remember the story. And her father said, “Sit down,” and she kept standing there. And he said, “I said sit down.” And she kept standing there defiantly. And he said, “Sit down or I’ll spank you.” And she sat down, and she looked at her father and said, “I’m sitting down, but I’m standing up in my heart.”

That’s not the kind of obedience we’re talking about, not the kind where you’re obeying but you’re really disobeying in your heart. Not a kind of a crushing legalism, but a spirit of obedience. There should be in the life of a believer a willingness to obey.

Now as you look at chapter 21 of John’s Gospel, you come to the incident in which Jesus confronts Peter and really wants to affirm Peter in the ministry. And so in verses 15 and following, He confronts Peter with this very important element of love. Glorifying God means you love Him enough to obey Him. Now just to give you a little bit of insight, go back to verse 15 and let’s see what’s going on.

It says there, “So when they had finished breakfast.” And they had met on the seashore there and they’d had breakfast together. And Jesus then confronts Simon Peter, and He says, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, lovest thou me more than these?” And He uses the word in the Greek, that is the magnanimous word for love, the greatest word for love, agapao [???], agape [???]. He says, “Do you super-love Me, Peter? Do you totally love Me? Am I the epitome of your affections, more than these?”

And some people think the “these” means the nets, and the boats, and the fishing, which were so much a love of Peter’s. Others think the “these” means the other disciples. Do you love Me more than these love me? Like you said one day when you told Me if everybody forsakes You, you never will because you love Me so much? But whatever He was referring to with the term “these,” He was asking Peter if he loved Him. “Do you super-love Me?”

“He said unto him, Yes, Lord; you know that I - ” and he didn’t use agapao [???], he used phileo [???], which means “I like You a lot.” Jesus says, “Do you super-love Me?” And Peter didn’t want to say, “Oh, Lord, I super-love You.” You know why? Jesus would have said to him, “Oh, really? Have you forgotten what I said? ‘If you love me, you will keep my - ” what? “ - commandments.’ ” Peter couldn’t claim that kind of love because he didn’t give any evidence of it.

Like the guy who wrote his sweetheart and said, “I’d cross the burning sand to be by your side. I’d swim the English Channel to be near you. And if it doesn’t rain tonight, I’m coming over.” Peter didn’t really have the nerve, or the gall, whatever, to say, “Oh, I love You,” with a super, because he was caught in the act of disobedience. So he says, “I like You a lot.” He was kind of sneaking in the backdoor a little bit, figuring the Lord would at least be able to accept that.

He said, “All right, Feed my lambs.” And what He wanted Peter to do was feed His lambs. He wanted Him to be a pastor. He wanted him to be one who would preach the Word, to help build the kingdom, and He accepted Peter on that level. “Second time, He said to him, Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you super-love me? He said unto Him, Yes, Lord, you know that I like you a lot. He said, Feed my sheep. He said unto him a third time, Simon, *son* of Jonah - ” and He used Peter’s word, and He said, “ - do you like me a lot?” And that hurt. “Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, Do you

like me a lot?" He wasn't grieved because He said the thing three times. He was grieved because the third time He even questioned the love Peter thought he could get away with. "And he said unto him, Lord, You know all things; You know I like You a lot."

Now the point right here is this. Jesus can't use anybody who doesn't love Him. And living to His glory means loving Him, and maybe your love isn't all that it could be. Maybe it isn't agapao [???]. Maybe it isn't supreme love. But if it's good solid phileo [???], Christ will use you. He'll take you where you are and build you from there. He wanted Peter to minister, but He knew there was a prerequisite, and that is that Peter had to love Him. No, he had to love Him enough to obey Him.

And so, having said that, He says to him in verse 18, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." And we looked at this verse in one of the earlier studies, but let's look at it from a different angle. "When you were young, you girded yourself, walked where you wanted: but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, another shall gird you, and carry *you* where thou wouldest not. This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

"All right," He says, "Peter, you really love Me, do you? Well, I have something to tell you. You're going to die for Me. Yes, Peter, if you continue in My service, if you go out to feed My sheep, feed My lambs, it's going to cost you your life." And then He says to him just a simple statement at the end of verse 19, "Follow me."

Now that's the acid test. Be one thing to follow the Lord if He said to you, "Oh, listen. Follow Me and you'll be successful. Follow Me and boy, you'll have the gravy train." Health, wealth, and happiness: that's what the cults promise. And that's what modern-day Christianity is promising a lot of people, too, you know? Be rich and famous and successful, everything'll be great. But He didn't say that to Peter. He said, "Peter, you love Me? Follow Me. It's going to cost you your life." Well, the implication is that Peter said, "All right."

Because between verses 19 and 20 Jesus got up and started walking, and Peter jumped up and followed Him. And they started to walk and Peter was going to follow, even though it cost him his life. But he went a little ways in verse 20 and it says, "Peter turned around." I mean, just couldn't resist, so he turned around to take a peek. And he saw "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Who's that? That's John, "the one who leaned on his breast at supper."

So Peter turns around and here's John. Now nobody ever had to tell John to follow. He always followed. Peter sees him and says to Jesus, "Lord, well, what about him?" "I mean, I'm going to die. What's going to happen to him?" "Jesus said to him, If I will that he tarries till I come, what *is that* to you?" If he lives till the second coming, it's none of your business. What a statement.

You know there was a rumor that went out all over the place. Did you hear that John's going to live till the second coming? And John had to write the last three verses of this chapter to straighten out that rumor. Jesus said if he lived till the second coming it'd be none of your business, and then He says this at the end of verse 22, "Follow thou me."

That's where the gospel of John ends. And when you pick it up again, you turn the page and you find yourself in the book of Acts. And the first thing you know, Peter stands up in Jerusalem, preaches a fantastic sermon, 3,000 people are saved, then he marches in the temple, heals a lame man, and the man jumps up and goes dancing through the temple, praising God. And the next thing you know, he confronts the Sanhedrin and tells them exactly what he thinks about them, and says, "There is no salvation under any other name but the name of Jesus Christ." And he says, "You can tell us to be quiet if you want, but we will not. Who should we obey, men or God?"

And clear through to the 13th chapter of Acts he is the shining light in the early church. And then he goes to the point where he writes two glorious epistles, and expresses in those epistles the tremendous joy in his heart for being called into the service of the Lord. And in 2 Peter chapter 1 he says, look, I want to tell you something, "I shortly must put off *this* my tabernacle, even as the Lord Jesus Christ has shown me." I'm going to die one of these days.

Now if I lived my whole life knowing I was going be a martyr, I'd be looking around every corner. I'll tell you, if I had heard that I was going to get crucified someday I'd be avoiding lumber yards and everything. I'd just be paranoid about that. But Peter says, "I'm telling you, I got to get my ministry done - " he's got the right perspective " - because I have a limited time, because I'm going to die." And "I want to endeavor that you may be able, after my death, to have these things in remembrance." So I'm telling you this, writing you this because I want to serve Christ till I die. And this was the death, said Jesus, by which he would glorify God.

Now listen, Peter loved Jesus enough to die for Him, and that glorifies God. That is a principle of spiritual maturity, people. You glorify God when you love Him enough to obey Him, even if it's a hard thing. God is glorified in the willingness that we have to make a sacrifice for His sake. Boy, that's a tremendous truth. And I really feel that that's part and parcel of spiritual growth. You grow as you willingly obey His will, no matter what it costs. As long as you're intersecting His will with yours, and you're not willing to take steps here or there unless they meet your conditions, you're retarding your spiritual growth.

Simply stated, spiritual growth is an abandonment to the will of God. And when your life is characterized by obedience, it's almost as if, if you could look at it in a physical analogy, every time you obey the Lord you grow an inch. Every time you disobey, you've retarded your growth. So, we glorify God by loving Him enough to obey Him. And as we live a life of obedience, that is an ever-maturing Christian life.

An eighth point, and this one is indeed very vital. We glorify God by prayer, and that means, then, that prayer is a very vital element in spiritual growth. Look with me at John chapter 14, John chapter 14. Now of course, we could talk a lot about prayer. It's all over the place in the Bible. But we want to keep moving so we can cover all of the points that we need to. But just kind of focusing in on this one passage in particular for this point. We glorify God by our prayers.

Now look at John 14:13-14. "And whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do." Now listen, we'll stop there for a minute. "Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do." Now that's a pretty great promise, isn't it? In fact, it's repeated in verse 14 just in case you didn't get it. "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do *it*."

Now do you know why God answers prayer? People say, "Well, God answers prayer in order to give us what we want. God answers prayer because He has to. He made a promise." Well, those things are true in a sense, but the real reason God answers prayer is given in verse 13, and it's a hina [???] purpose clause in the Greek. God will answer your prayer in the name of Christ, "in order that the Father may be - " what? " - glorified in the Son." The reason God answers prayer is not for your sake. It's for His sake, you see? It's because He benefits, and He puts Himself on display.

Now I don't think we really understand that. Some of us are reluctant to pray because we're not too sure God's going to answer. We miss the point. God will answer because God wants to put Himself on display. So when I pray, I glorify God. Why? Because I give God opportunity to work, and as I give God opportunity to work, He manifests Himself and receives glory. Prayer is a vital element in spiritual growth. You will not grow unless you interact with God and see His power on display. It'll increase your faith as you do it, and faith is a key element in spiritual growth, a very important point.

Now let me look back at verse 13 with you for a second, and let's see what it's saying. The disciples were, of course, greatly distressed because Jesus was leaving. He had told them that He was going to go away, it would be very soon, they wouldn't see Him anymore, and He would send the Comforter, and so forth. They were very aware that Jesus was going to leave. In fact, just a few verses after this He reiterates it. He told them, "I'm going to go and prepare a place for you," and all of this, and don't be upset about it. I'll come again and receive you.

But you see, they were really fearful because they had put all their eggs in one basket, and now Jesus would be gone and where would their resources be? When they needed tax money, you know, Jesus took it out of the mouth of a fish. When they got hungry, He created bread and fish. When they didn't have a place to lay their head, He comforted them and they stayed together in the hills of Galilee or the Garden of Gethsemane. He was a beloved friend. He was a spiritual resource, a theological resource, an economic resource. He was everything to them. He was the future of their lives as well as the present. And now He's going to go and they're panicked. And He says, "Look,

don’t worry. Even though I go, you’ll still have a resource because whatever you need and ask for in My name I’ll do it. I don’t have to be here.”

Now that’s a pretty great promise. Now people say, “Well, it says right there, ‘you shall ask in my name.’ ” Now that’s more than a formula, you know? Some people think that that means at the end of every prayer you have to say, “in Jesus’ name, amen,” and that binds God. You know you hear some guy pray, and then he just says, “amen.” And some people go, “Oh, it never got through. He won’t get it. You have to say, ‘in Jesus’ name, amen.’ ” Because you put that little deal on there and that hangs God, right? He’s got to do it.

That isn’t what it’s talking about. Prayer isn’t a matter of little formulas. It isn’t to say that if you don’t say, “in Jesus’ name, amen,” the prayer doesn’t get past the ceiling. What does it mean “in My name”? Well, if you study the Bible you find out that any time you see “the name of God” or “the name of Christ,” that that is a concept that embodies all that He is. “My name is I Am That I Am.” God’s name is the embodiment of all that He is, and Christ’s name is the embodiment of all that He is.

And what He’s saying is that when you ask consistently with who I am and what I will, I’ll do it. He’s simply saying “when you pray in accord with My will,” you see? When you pray in accord with all that He is. Now you really ought to kind of guide your prayer life along that line if you want to grow spiritually, if you want to see God on display, which increases your faith and pulls you along in spiritual growth. You know, use this kind of a thing at the end of your prayer instead of saying “in Jesus’ name, amen.” Say this: “This I pray because this I believe to be the will of Christ.” That’s what the verse is saying.

Now you know, you can be careful about that next time you pray and say, “Lord, I’d like to have a new car. Lord, I just don’t like the one I’ve got. I’d like to have a new car and this I ask because I believe this is the will of - ” no. No, that probably wouldn’t do too well. Or Lord, I just, I’ve got this husband, Lord. I don’t know how to word this, Lord. Is there any way I can get another one? This I ask because I believe this is the - ” no. “Lord, I have this kid, you know. Lord, I’ve got four, and three are great. Whose kid is this? Is there any way? This I ask - ” nope, doesn’t make it. It’s like the little kid who prayed, “God bless mommy. God bless daddy. And God, I’d like a new bicycle!” And his mommy said, “God isn’t deaf.” He said, “I know, but grandma’s in the next room, and she is hard of hearing.”

You know, we’re trying to con God, see? Force God’s hand, bind Him by a misconstrued idea of what His promise meant. No, you see, to pray in My name really limits our prayers. I can pray, “Oh God, I pray that in this situation this dear brother who is ill may grow spiritually, may see a new vision of You, may have his heart enriched in the midst of his trial. This I ask because I believe it to be the will of Jesus Christ,” right? That’s consistent with who He is and what you know His will is.

Now beloved, that's precisely what it means to pray in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit isn't falling over backwards. Praying in the Spirit isn't talking in some foreign language or ecstatic tongue. Praying in the Spirit is praying consistent with the Spirit of God's will. And the Spirit of God is always praying in the life of the believer, always. In fact, Romans 8 says that "we know not what to pray for as we ought: so the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." In other words, in a nonverbal language between the Spirit in us and the Father on the throne, He always prays for us and His prayer is always answered because He knows the mind of the Father. And so praying in the Spirit is lining my prayers up with the will of the Spirit and the will of Christ, and the best place to start to do that is to find out what Their will is by looking in the Word of God.

Start praying according to His will. That's not a cop-out. That's what the Bible says to do. Now watch, when you pray according to His will, He will do it, in order that He may be glorified.

Now listen, you want to know something? He might do it anyway, even if you didn't pray. That's right. If it was His will to do it, He'd do it anyway. But you know something? You wouldn't have the opportunity to see Him do it. You wouldn't be in on it, thus you wouldn't give Him glory.

Illustration. If somebody comes to a prayer meeting and they stand up and they say, "Oh, I had the most wonderful thing happen, you know? This lady that I've been sharing Christ with, I have been praying for her for years, and this week we knelt together in my house, and she opened her heart, and she invited Jesus Christ to come in. And I'm so thrilled. Now she's a believer, and here she is with us tonight. Thank you for praying for her for these last few months."

And immediately when that happens ripples are going go through that, and somebody's going to say, "Oh, praise the Lord. They're going to get big grins on their faces. "Oh Lord, thank You." You know who those people are going to be? Who are they going to be? They're going to be the ones who were doing what? Praying for her. And then there's going to be some people sitting back there going uh-huh, staring around, totally indifferent. You know why? They weren't involved.

You see, the reason to pray is not to force God's hand. The reason to pray is so that you can be in on what He's doing, because then you can join the hallelujah chorus, you see, and praise Him. There used to be a fellow in our church and his name was Frank. And Frank came up to me in the patio one time and he said, "John," he said, "I would like to pray for you but I don't know what to pray for." And so he said, "Would you give me three requests." And I said, "All right." I thought it was a little unusual. And he took out a little notebook, a spiral thing, and he wrote down one request, and another, and another.

And so I just went on my way and I thought, "Well, that's a little different. Never seen anybody do that that way." But later on he came to me and he said, about two weeks later, "John, I want to check on those three requests." And he flipped back a few pages where those three things were, and he said,

“What happened on number one, and number two, and number three?” So we talked for about ten minutes, and I told him, and he wrote it all down in another column. So he had a request here and an answer here.

And I had occasion one time to visit his home before he moved back to Detroit and I noticed that he had 13 of those spiral notebooks already filled and he was working on number 14. Now you know, there’s a guy who’s seen God on display, right? You say to him, “Say, Frank, do you believe God answers prayer?” “What kind would you like to see? I got them indexed. I got a whole pile of salvations on this page, and over here’s some, you know - ” You see what, what he was doing, you see, was letting God display His power in his life by being in on what God was doing.

That’s the primary issue in prayer, not getting what I want, but letting God display Himself. If residually, I get what I want, that’s gravy. Mostly important is that I get what I need, right? And sometimes what I need is not what I want. The point of prayer, then, is to let God display Himself. Oh, what a great thing it is. And people, if you’re going to grow spiritually, you’re going to grow spiritually as you see God’s power on display. And prayer puts you into that experience.

I’ll tell you, the more you pray, the more faithful your prayer life, the faster your spiritual growth because God will be doing great and mighty things which you know not, and your expanse of confidence in His power will increase your spiritual maturity. So we glorify God by prayer.

And then a ninth key to spiritual growth, a ninth way in which we glorify God. And this one is very important. In fact, I could talk on this one for a long time. We glorify God by proclaiming the Word. We glorify God by proclaiming the Word. 2 Thessalonians 3:1, “Finally, brethren - ” and I always kind of chuckle about that because Paul says, “finally,” and then goes on for 18 verses, typical preacher style. “Finally, brethren, pray for us - ” and what are we going to pray for? “ - that the Word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified.” Oh, I like that. I like that.

“The Word of the Lord” is really the expression of God. He is synonymous with His Word. His Word in the Old Testament, out of His mouth, His Word in the New Testament in the living Christ, is synonymous with His person, and God is glorified when His Word is proclaimed. In Galatians 1:23-24 we read this, and of course this is regarding the apostle Paul and his conversion and subsequent ministry. It says that the churches of Judea “had heard only, That he who persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed.”

The churches hear that this fellow, Saul of Tarsus, who was busy persecuting the faith, was now preaching the faith. And what did they do? Verse 24, “They glorified God because of me.” Why did they glorify God? Because the Word was being preached, the Word was being proclaimed.

Now, God is glorified in His Word. Anytime you proclaim the Word of God, you're giving Him glory. Why? Because you're acknowledging that it is the truth. You're acknowledging that it is a life-giving Word, that it is a life-changing Word, a life-transforming Word, a life-sustaining Word. You're saying this is a powerful Word, alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, and so forth. When you proclaim the Word of God as the absolute source of truth, you are honoring and glorifying God because He says the same thing about His Word that you're saying when you hold it up as the standard.

In fact, in Acts chapter 13:48, I believe it is, says, "And when the Gentiles heard this, - " that is, they heard the message of everlasting life " - they were glad, and they glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region." And here again, they glorified God in the proclamation of the Word.

Now this is so very basic and I don't want to get too basic and cover things we've covered before, but let me just say this. There is no spiritual growth without the taking in of the Word. You can't grow without food, right? And that should be a daily process. You don't come to church on Sunday and take in your message and say, "Oh, that was a wonderful message. I hope it hangs in there and holds me till next week," any more than you eat dinner on Sunday and say, "Now, Lord, we're having a wonderful Sunday dinner and we're just praying that it'll hold us until next Sunday." You got to eat probably Sunday night, and Monday, Tuesday, and so forth.

The same thing is true spiritually. There must be a daily feeding on the Word. But listen. There is a greater glory than feeding that comes in giving because as you proclaim the Word and give it out, you have a way of cementing it in your own life. It's kind of like the little statement that says, "The more you give away the more you keep," right? I've found out as a teacher that the things I teach, I remember. The things I read but never pass on, I forget.

And so God is glorified in the proclamation of His Word. The servant of God is to give a high priority to the proclaiming of the Word. When you are silent about the gospel, and you are silent about the Word of God, and it isn't on your lips all the time you'll retard your spiritual growth.

You know, back in Deuteronomy, God said to the people of Israel, "You should talk about My law when you stand up, sit down, lie down, and walk in the way. It should be on your lips all the time. You should put it in a little thing and hang it between your eyes on your forehead. You should put it on your wrists. You put it in a box and stick it on the doorposts of your house. You talk about it all the time, all the time, all the time. The Word should be literally filling your heart and your mind so that whenever you open your mouth it comes out."

Trumbull [???] was a great soul-winner years back, and he said the thing that made the difference in his life, the thing that totally turned his life around was when he made a vow to God. And this was his

vow. He said, “God giving me the strength, every time I introduce the topic of conversation, it will always be concerning Jesus.” He kept that vow through his life. Every time he opened his mouth, a conversation about Jesus came out. He saturated himself with it, and so saturated was he that whenever he opened his mouth, that’s what happened.

You know, I’ve spent so many years studying the Bible and preaching that I know if you poked me in the middle of the night and I popped up I’d probably recite Bible verses or preach a sermon. I dream about spiritual things. I have biblical dreams. That happens to me a lot, or dreams about the church. That’s the context of my thinking, see? And I thank God for that. God is gracious to me because He could’ve put me somewhere else and I wouldn’t have had the luxury of studying the Bible all the time.

But the filling of the mind, and then as you teach it, you see, when you need to teach the Word like I do, or any other Bible teacher, you have to take it and saturate yourself, and saturate, and saturate. You can’t just write it on the notes and fire it off. It’s got to go through you. And whatever you give away has become so much a part of you that it controls your life. And as you proclaim it, your life is evidently glorifying God in the speaking of His Word.

Now frankly, folks, I’ll even go a step further. If Balaam’s ass spoke the Word of God, it would glorify God. And if Cyrus, who wasn’t even a believer, spoke the Word of the Lord, it would glorify Him. If a rotten evil Caiaphas, the high priest, spoke the Word of God and it came to pass it would glorify God. Whenever God’s Word is uttered, it glorifies Him, but much more so when it flows out of the life of a believer.

What I’m saying is you cannot grow spiritually if you are not speaking the Word of God. I believe it’s a key to spiritual growth to be uttering the truth of the Word of God. We must give a high priority in our lives to His Word, this very essential element.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3, just to give you another thought on this, it says, “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.”

Now watch that. What is the goal of spiritual maturity? To be perfect, to be mature, to grow up. And how do you do it? All Scripture takes you along the line of doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, another purpose clause, “in order that the man of God may be perfect.” So that the process is the process of the working of the Word of God in your heart, and it never works as well in your life as when you’re teaching it to somebody else, preaching it to somebody else, sharing it with somebody else. That’s what makes it really find root in your heart.

And of course, in 2 Timothy 2:15, we have that very special word that says, “Study - ” or “be diligent” “ - to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing

the word of truth." That phrase literally means "cutting it straight." Paul was a tent maker and he made tents by cutting the patterns out. He made tents out of goatskin and no one goat was big enough for a tent. There wasn't a super goat, just one goat made a tent. They were small animals, and you had to sew them up in pieces. And if you didn't cut the individual pieces together, the pattern didn't fit. And he's saying unless you're careful with the individual parts of Scripture, the total doesn't come together.

And so we are to be students of the Word, filling our hearts and filling our lives with this tremendous truth. And as we proclaim it, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, "The Word of God has *free* course, and is glorified." How do we glorify God? By proclaiming His Word: to believers, to unbelievers, to those who will hear, and those who will not.

I can remember as a young person when I first started in college and I'd decided I wanted to be a preacher, and so some of the folks wanted to help me be a preacher. So they would take me to the bus depot, and they would drop me off at 7:00 at night and pick me up at 9:00, and they would tell me to preach there till they got back. I started preaching in Greyhound bus depot. And I would just go in there with my Bible in my arm, and didn't have any music, nobody with me, and I'd just stand there and start preaching. Now folks, that's tough. That's - it's not only tough, it's dumb. People would walk by and I know what they were thinking. "And he's so young to be bereft of his senses. You know, 18-year-old maniac."

But I would stand there and I would preach, and I would preach. And then I'd go wander down the street, and I'd talk to people about Christ. But you know, in spite of the foolishness, in spite of the inadequacy of the message I gave, God was glorified because it was His Word, see? To proclaim His Word gives Him glory. That's why I'm not interested in giving you my opinion. I'm not interested in giving book reviews. God doesn't get any glory out of that. But proclaiming His Word gives Him glory. The greatest calling a person can have in the whole universe is just to give people God's Word.

In fact, I don't even want to fool with it. I just like to take it like it is and give it. You know I'm a waiter, right? I'm just a waiter. I'm a glorified busboy. That's the term used. That's what "deacon" means, a servant. I'm just a glorified busboy. The Lord cooks the meal. Says, "MacArthur, get it to the table without messing it up." That's all. He doesn't want creativity. He wants delivery. He doesn't want innovation. He just says, "Get it there the way I meant it to be."

And that's the great, great joy of the ministry. We glorify God, then, by proclaiming His Word. And as we proclaim His Word, and as we pray, and as we praise Him, and as we aim our lives at His purposes and His will, and as we love Him enough to obey, no matter what it costs, as we do all these things which give Him glory, we are moving in progression toward Christlikeness.

There’s no other way to define the Christian life than as a progress - now mark it - a progress to glorifying God. And you know something? It’s always a sort of an elusive thing, because the longer I live, the more failures I see in my life. People say, “Well, you know as you go along, it’ll get easier.” No, it gets no easier, because the more you know, and the more you understand, the more you see your limitations. And so you’re ever, ever pressing toward the mark with never a sense of having attained, and in your heart you long for the day when you’ll be like Him, for you shall see Him as He is.

Let me give you one more thought in this study, a tenth way in which we glorify the Lord. We glorify God by bringing others to Him. Now this is the natural outgrowth of proclaiming the Word. We’re just going to spend a brief moment on this. But 2 Corinthians 4:15, 2 Corinthians 4:15 says - Paul is writing, of course, to the Corinthians and he had them in his heart, was deeply concerned. In 1 Corinthians he had said some pretty hard stuff. He had pretty well flattened them just about every way you could, sarcasm and everything, told them he’d come to them with a rod and whip them, and all these things.

And so he kind of tells them why he did this, and why he talked this way in 2 Corinthians. And this is what he says in 4:15, “For all things - ” all the things I’ve ever done in ministry to you, in fact all the things that have ever happened to me, being “troubled on every side,” verse 8; being “persecuted,” verse 9; “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” verse 10; always having to face death for the ministry; all these hard things that I’ve done, “*are* for your sakes.”

Here was a man who was totally committed to the needs of others. It’s all for you. What is the purpose, Paul? “In order that the abundant grace - ” and that’s saving grace, redeeming grace “ - might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.” Paul, why do you do this? Why do you go into town when it’s hostile? I mean, why do you go where you know you’re going to get persecuted? Why do you take all of this flak? Why don’t you sneak around the back alleys, pass out tracts, and beat it out of town and claim the promise “the Word never returns void”? Why do you confront everybody? Why do you wind up in jail? “All of these things *are* that you may know the abundance of saving grace.” Why? That you may thank God, see? That “the thanksgiving of many - ” in other words, he wants to add another voice to the thanksgiving choir. He wants to add somebody else who can glorify God.

And I guess, if you really pin me down, this is probably the greatest element of glorifying God. When you win somebody else to Christ, you see, you double the potential, don’t you? If I can glorify God with my life and win someone else to Christ, then that makes somebody else who has all that potential, too. God is glorified when we bring others to Him. And frankly, that, too, is a part of spiritual growth. One of the keys to spiritual growth is winning people to Christ, because that adds another voice to those who praise and thank the Lord. It’s so important that we see that these are all simple things that we know.

People say, “Oh, spiritual growth, you know, belongs to those who are so far above me. You know, I used to read Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation Of Christ*, and I used to read about mystics, you know, who could kneel and pray for eight to ten hours, and they’d have little holes in the wood floors, you know. And I used to read about Robert Murray McCheyne, who would stand at his pulpit, and he dropped his head in his Bible and great floods of tears would gush out of his face and soil the pages of his Bible and the tear-stained pulpit.

And I would read about these kinds of people who seemed to walk with God at a level that’s incomprehensible. Read a book by E.M. Bounds called *Power Through Prayer*, and this man was consumed hour upon hour upon hour with prayer. And I’d say to myself, “Oh, you know, it’s useless.” Right? I mean I just, I’ll never get to that level. And that’s because God uses everybody in a different way.

But spiritual growth is not some mystical thing for somebody way off in some spaced-out, spiritual distance. Spiritual growth is very simple. It’s a matter of obedience, a matter of loving the Lord. It’s a matter of praying, praising, believing, confessing sin, proclaiming the Word, bearing fruit, all of these things, and winning people to Christ. It’s that simple. That’s the element in your life that’s going to mean maturity. And the sooner we focus on these simple basics, the sooner we’re going to see the Spirit of God changing us into the image of Christ, from one level of glory to the next. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You for our study. We thank You that You’ve given us some very simple and basic principles that we can apply to our lives to grow spiritually. God help us to be discontent with where we are, and like the apostle Paul, ever hunger in our hearts to know Him in a greater way, to be more like Him, that we might manifest Your fullness in this world, for Your praise, in Christ’s name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).