

Keys to Spiritual Growth: Introduction

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Priority of Spiritual Growth

I believe that there is no more important study in the Word of God for the believer than the theme of spiritual growth. There are two important Scriptures that will help us to put that theme in perspective:

1. 2 PETER 3:18 -- "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen." That is the summation of what Peter had to say in his second epistle.

2. 1 PETER 2:2 -- "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it." Peter began and ended his very practical epistles with an injunction for Christians to grow. Spiritual growth is basic to the life of a believer, just as physical growth is basic to the life of any person. God commands Christians to grow. In our study of spiritual growth, we want to examine what it means to mature as a believer.

B. The Perspectives on Spiritual Growth

I would like to share with you some concepts that will help us begin our study.

1. THE MISCONCEPTIONS

First of all, spiritual growth has nothing to do with...

a. Our Position in Christ

A person does not grow into becoming a Christian; conversion is an instantaneous miracle. The new birth is a sudden occurrence in the life of a believer. The moment he exercises faith in Christ, he is placed into the body of Christ. It is not a process; it is a marvelous, instantaneous miracle. There may be a process of exposing someone to the gospel; but the actual point of salvation occurs in a miraculous moment. The new believer passes from death into life, "from the power of darkness...into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13b). Spiritual growth is not a question of your position in Christ

because you were placed in Christ the moment you put your faith in Him.

1) 2 Corinthians 5:17 -- "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation...."

2) Colossians 2:10 -- "And ye are complete in Him...."

3) 2 Peter 1:3 -- The believer receives "all things that pertain unto life and godliness...."

When you became a believer, you were placed into Christ. You received all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies and all things that pertain to life and godliness. Therefore you became complete in Him, positionally. Spiritual growth is not a matter of your position in Christ. Second, spiritual growth is not a matter of...

b. God's Love

A parent will often say to his child, "If you do what I want, I'll love you." God would never say that because He loves us no matter what we do. According to Romans 5:1-11, God loved us when we were sinners. We were His enemies, alienated from Him before we ever came to Christ. When you became a believer, God continued to love you. There are no grades of love with God. He loves all people equally--even the unsaved. When you become a believer, God loves you as one of His family. You cannot gain more of God's love.

Spiritual growth is not a matter of position in Christ, God's love, or third...

c. Time

There are many people who have been saved for a long period but have grown very little. There are many people who have been saved for a brief period and have grown very much. Certainly time is a factor in spiritual growth in some cases (those who continue to grow over a long period of time will be more mature than one who has grown over a shorter period). But the amount of time isn't what is important; it is a commitment to the principles of growth that makes the difference. We don't measure spiritual maturity by the calendar.

Fourth, spiritual growth is not a matter of your...

d. Accumulated Knowledge

Sometimes we equate spiritual maturity with what we know, but that isn't the key. Knowledge alone is not the issue; the issue is what you do with what you know. The Bible says,

"...Knowledge puffeth up..." (1 Cor. 8:1). When a believer becomes prideful, spiritual growth is immediately retarded. Having a knowledge of facts cannot be equated with spiritual maturity. Only when those facts conform us to the image of Christ does our knowledge relate to our growth.

Another thing to consider is that spiritual growth has nothing to do with...

e. Activity

Some people think that if they have been active in the church (e.g., they served on a committee or sung in the choir), then they have grown spiritually. In other words, if you're busy enough, you must be spiritual. But the Pharisees were busy in religion, and no one was further from the truth than they were. In Matthew 7:22-23 Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not...done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me...." Being busy doesn't even qualify someone for salvation, let alone spiritual growth.

There is one final introductory thought: Spiritual growth has nothing to do with...

f. Prosperity

Many people equate their economic situation with the favor of God. If they possess much, they think God has blessed them because they are such wonderful Christians. God may have blessed them, but that isn't necessarily an indication that they are spiritually mature. Don't equate positive circumstances with God's approval of your spiritual maturity.

2. THE MEANING

If spiritual growth is not a matter of your position in Christ, God's love, time, knowledge, activity, and prosperity, then what is spiritual growth? It is not mystical, sentimental, devotional, or psychological. It is not a result of some clever secret or formula that can be easily applied to life as a guarantee of the future. Spiritual growth is simply matching my practice with my position. Now, my position in Christ is perfect: I am complete in Him. I have all things that pertain to life and godliness. I have received all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. But I need to progress in my practical life in a way that is commensurate with my position.

C. The Purpose of Spiritual Growth

1. THE MASTER KEY

The master key to understanding and experiencing spiritual growth is found in 2 Peter 3:18: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen." Growing in grace is equated with giving glory to God. The master key to the process

of spiritual growth is understanding what it means to glorify Him.

2. THE CHIEF END

The greatest theme in all of the universe is the glory of God. It is the apex of God's revelation. We exist in order to glorify Him. The Westminster Shorter Catechism of the seventeenth century said that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In fact, that is the chief end of everything.

For example:

a. The Universe

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God...." The vastness of space glorifies God.

b. The Animals

Isaiah 43:20 says, "The beast of the field shall honor Me...."

c. The Angels

In Luke 2:14 angels appeared at the birth of Christ, and said, "Glory to God in the highest...."

All of the created universe is designed to give glory to God. As history is resolved in the Book of Revelation--when God redeems His people and is ready to set up His glorious eternal Kingdom--a great song will be sung that gives glory to God and the Lamb. That is the purpose for everything that was ever created. In Psalm 16:8-9 David said, "I have set the LORD always before me.... Therefore my heart is glad...." In other words, in all that I do I focus on the glory of God, and then He makes me joyful. That is the exchange that God has designed: "You give Me glory and I'll give you joy." We exist in order to give glory to God.

D. The Process of Spiritual Maturity

As we glorify God, we begin to grow.

1. THE RESPONSE TO GOD'S GLORY

a. Change

1) The Perspective

Second Corinthians 3:18 is a monumental text in the New Testament. Paul says, "But we all [believers are], with unveiled face...." In the Old Testament, the veil of the law covered believers. But the New Testament removed that veil. As a result, no longer are things hidden from us; no longer do we have to search, as the prophets did, to understand what they wrote. Verse 18 continues to say that we are "...beholding as in a glass [focusing into a clear glass] the glory of the Lord...." As we understand the New Testament and its great truths, we focus on the glory of the Lord. Then verse 18 says that we "are changed into the same image from [one level of] glory to [the next level of] glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

2) The Power

The power behind spiritual growth is the Holy Spirit. He energizes our growth; He gives life--and life is growth. As the Spirit infuses our lives with His power, He causes us to grow into the image of Christ, from one level of glory to the next. But there is one condition: we must gaze into the glory of the Lord. As we focus on God's glory, the Spirit of God energizes the process of spiritual growth. The point is, in order to grow spiritually, you must focus on God's glory. Don't worry about what the Holy Spirit does, and don't become introspective and analytical--just focus on the glory of the Lord. That is the ultimate reason for living and the master key to spiritual growth.

b. Condemnation

Conversely, the ultimate reason for the condemnation of men is that they don't give glory to God. In Romans 1:21, the Apostle Paul indicts the human race for its defection from the truth. He says that "they knew God...." All of civilization knew God "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them..." (Rom. 1:19). They knew God through their conscience. Verse 20 says, "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen...." They also knew God from creation. Man had both an internal and an external knowledge of God. But verse 21 says, "...when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God...." That is the basic indictment of the human race--they failed to give glory to God. Instead, they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (v. 23). In other words, they invented idolatrous systems of religion. When man abandoned the concept of glorifying God, he cut himself off from spiritual life and growth. The history of man is a descent, not an ascent. He cannot grow because he refuses to glorify God. And glorifying God is the impetus needed for spiritual growth.

2. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY

Throughout history, God has endeavored to do one primary thing: to get men to see His glory. He wants to reverse the Fall and change the reality of Romans 1 so that man will not turn away from the glory of God, but turn to it.

a. In the Past

Throughout Biblical history, God has attempted a variety of ways to enable man to see His glory. For example:

1) In the Garden

a.) Living with God's Glory

Genesis 3:8 says that Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...." The great reality of life in the Garden of Eden before the fall was that Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God. The Hebrews had a word for that presence--shekinah, which means, "to dwell, to reside." Adam and Eve lived with the Shekinah of God.

According to John 4:24, God is a Spirit, so He didn't have a body in the Garden. Then how did God manifest Himself? I believe He appeared in a glorious, incandescent, brilliant light. That is the way He appears in other Scriptures. The representation of God's infinite and eternal glory dwelt in the Garden with Adam and Eve. They in turn fellowshiped with Him.

b.) Losing God's Glory

But immediately when Adam and Eve sinned, they were thrown out of the Garden, cut off from God's glory. An angel with a sword was placed at the entrance of the Garden to keep them out (Gen. 3:24). Fallen man cannot experience the glory of God, dwell in His presence, and give Him glory. When Adam and Eve were cut off from God, that became the tragedy of human history. But from that point on, God has endeavored to get men to see His glory.

2) In the Face of Moses

In Exodus 33, the Israelites were led by Moses. They had reached a crisis point in their life as a nation, having left Egypt to go to the Promised Land. God wanted them to believe that He is a God of great glory. He wanted them to see His glory, to have His presence with them, and to acknowledge Him for who He is.

a) The Request of Moses

In Exodus 33:1-3, God communed with Moses and reiterated a commission He had previously given him (Ex. 3:7-18) to lead His people. But Moses was afraid of his inabilities, so in verse 12 he said, "See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me...." Moses was saying, "God, You're giving me a big job, and You don't even tell me

who's going to help." Some estimate that there may have been as many as two million people in the camp. In verse 13 Moses said, "...if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee...." In other words, "God, I believe You're out there, but give me a demonstration that You're going to be with me in this very difficult task." In verse 14, God said, "My presence shall go with thee...." That was clear to Moses. In verse 18 he says, "I beseech thee, show me Thy glory." The presence of God was His manifest glory.

b) The Response of God

God said, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19). In other words, "You'll see My goodness, My name (the embodiment of all My attributes), My grace, and My mercy." So what is the glory of God? It is the embodiment of all of His attributes. God reduced them to a glorious light in order to show them to Moses. In verses 22-23 God says, "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back; but My face shall not be seen." No one could ever see the full glory of God and live, so God says, "I'm going to let you see a little of My afterglow."

c) The Reflection of Glory

Moses saw God's glory, and it got all over his face (Ex. 34:29). He came down the mountain to the people of Israel, and they were shocked. Moses' face was glowed like a lightbulb! God was using Moses to say, "People of Israel, will you see My glory?"

3) In the Sky

When the Israelites moved into the wilderness, they were led by a great white cloud in the daytime and by a pillar of fire at night (Ex. 13:21). The glory of God was on the face of Moses, and in the sky day and night. God was saying, "See My glory--the fullness of My attributes!" But sadly, even though they had seen God's glory on the face of Moses, they murmured, complained, and disobeyed. And even though they saw the glory every day and night as they were led through the wilderness, they were so unbelieving and faithless that the first generation from Egypt died in the wilderness. God said, "See My glory," and man again turned his back.

4) In the Tabernacle

When the Tabernacle had been built, Exodus 40:34 says, "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." The Tabernacle was a place of worship. Each of the twelve tribes of Israel had a particular place in the circle of tribes around the

Tabernacle. In the midst of the Tabernacle was the glory of God, and all of the people were to focus on it. When the Tabernacle was completed, the glory of God descended upon it. When it remained in the Tabernacle, the people were to camp. But when the glory of God went into the sky as a cloud or pillar of fire, the people were to move. So God revealed His glory on the face of a man, in the sky, and in the midst of the Tabernacle. But in each case the people murmured, disobeyed, complained, and griped. They never gave God the glory He deserved.

5) In the Temple

a) The Display of God's Glory

When the nation of Israel had been in the Promised Land for a number of years, God said, "You will build a temple" (2 Sam. 7:12-13). That Temple was finally built by Solomon, and 1 Kings 8:10-11 says, "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD." God had put His glory on the face of a man, in the sky, in a tent, and now in a Temple--a magnificent edifice, unequaled in the world. Again God was saying to the people, "See My glory. Focus on it. Recognize who I am, and give Me proper reverence and worship."

b) The Defiance of God's Glory

Later in history, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Temple. He said, "And He [the Lord] brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. Then said He unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall; and when I had digged in the wall, behold, a door. And He said unto me, Go in.... So I went in and saw; and, behold, every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about" (Ezk. 8:7-10). The Temple of God had been turned into a place of idolatry. The people had done exactly what Romans 1:23 says godless people will do--instead of worshiping and giving glory to God, they turned the glory of God into creeping things. Ezekiel 8:11 talks about the men who usurped the place of priests. Verse 16 says that they worshiped the sun. According to verse 14, they worshiped Tammuz, an ancient fertility god. In other words, Ezekiel was saying that they turned the Temple into a place of idolatry. God had said, "Here's My glory. It is not on the face of a man, in the sky, or in a tent, but it is in the Temple." And again the people refused to see His glory.

c) The Departure of God's Glory

In Ezekiel 10:18-19 and 11:22-23, the name Ichabod (which means, "the glory has departed" according to 1 Sam. 4:21) could have been invoked by God as His glory departed from the Temple. In effect God said, "If you don't give Me glory, I'll remove your opportunity to give Me glory." God had

been very patient. He had revealed His glory in the Garden, in the wilderness, and in the land of Canaan. But every time the nation refused to give Him glory.

6) In Christ

But God wasn't finished with Israel. He revealed His glory one more time. In John 1:14, the Apostle John said this about Jesus Christ: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)...." Jesus was the glory of God in a body--the embodiment of the Shekinah. In Luke 9:29, after Jesus went up into a mountain to pray, He was transfigured--He pulled back His flesh. Verse 32 says that Peter, John, and James "saw His glory...." Jesus showed them who He really was.

One final time our gracious God said this to mankind: "Here is My glory. Will you honor Me?" God revealed His glory in Jesus Christ, not just in the Garden, on the face of a man, in the sky, in a tent, or in a building. And what did the world say? "...We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14b). The Pharisees said that He "doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of demons" (Mt. 12:24). Eventually the crowd said, "Crucify Him!" (Jn. 19:15). Once again people tragically turned their back on His glory.

a. In the Future

But there is coming a day in the future when man won't have that option. When Jesus Christ returns, Matthew 24:30 says that He is "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." And when He comes, the Bible says that the glory of the Lord will fill the earth (Num. 14:21). Revelation 6:15-16 says that the people who see Him will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to hide them from His face. Why? I believe He is going to come in blazing glory that will blind the world. His glory will fill the whole earth, and then there won't be any options left. Finally He will be glorified. All of creation will sing, "Glory to the Lamb! Glory to God." Ultimately, He will have His glory.

b. In the Present

In the past, God endeavored to get men to see His glory; in the future, He will display His glory in such a way that men won't have an option. But what about the present? What now is the significance of the glory of God?

In Ephesians 3:19-21, Paul desired that we "be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think...unto Him be glory in the church...." In the Old Testament, the glory of God was in a building, in a tent, on the face of a man, in the sky, and in the Garden. In the future, the glory of God will be displayed in the coming of Christ. But right now the glory of God should be displayed in the church. That is why Paul says the following:

1) Colossians 1:27

"...Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory."

2) 2 Corinthians 4:6

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." If the glory of God in the face of Christ is to be seen by anyone, it has to shine through us. The greatest calling for a believer is to glorify God--to "adorn the doctrine of God", as Paul said to Titus (2:10b).

In this present age, God has called us to manifest His glory. If the world is ever going to see that glory, it must be made visible through Christ in us, "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And that is the key to our own spiritual growth.

3. THE REJECTION OF GOD'S GLORY

Nothing is more important to God than His glory.

a. In Isaiah 48:11 He says, "...I will not give My glory unto another." He maintains His glory for Himself because everything exists to give Him glory. And if a person does not do that, he is lives contrary to the very intention of the universe and rejects God. a. Jeremiah 13:15-17 -- Jeremiah gave a dramatization to make a point concerning the glory of God. He said, "Hear, and give ear; be not proud; for the LORD hath spoken. Give glory to the LORD, your God..." (vv. 15- 16a). The thing that stands in the way of glorifying God is pride. Man seeks glory for himself; thus he cannot be free to give glory to God. So Jeremiah said, "Don't be proud; give glory to God." Then he said, "...before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness" (v. 16). He was saying, "You either give God glory or else He will cause you to fall into darkness, stumble, and die." Verse 17 says, "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep bitterly, and run down with tears...." When people don't glorify God, that breaks God's heart and the heart of His prophet because people then put themselves in the place of judgment.

b. Daniel 4:30-34 -- Nebuchadnezzar thought he was without equal--not just in Babylon--but in the whole world. Having accomplished some great things he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built...?" (v. 30). He was saying, "How wonderful I am! How majestic I am! How powerful I am! Look what I've done." Verse 31 says, "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee." That was enough for Nebuchadnezzar. He had gone too far. No one can compete with God.

Nebuchadnezzar was like King Uzziah, of whom the Bible says, "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction..." (2 Chron. 26:16). God gave him leprosy, and he died in that condition (2 Chron. 26:19-21).

What did God do to Nebuchadnezzar? Verse 32 says, "And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee to eat grass like oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men...." God was saying, "Until you learn who's really on the throne, you're going to turn into a beast." And that's what happened. Verse 33 says, "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men, and did eat grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." Nebuchadnezzar became a raving maniac in the wilderness. Verse 34 says, "And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him who liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation." He finally realized that you either give glory to God, or else He deals very strongly with you.

c. Acts 12:21-23 -- There was a man named Herod, one of the Herods who ruled in Palestine around the time of Christ. He lived in Caesarea by the seacoast. Verse 21 begins, "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and died." Herod didn't give glory to God.

You either glorify God or you pay the price. The generation that failed to see the glory of God on the face of Moses, in the sky, and in the Tabernacle was destroyed in the wilderness. The people that refused to see the glory of God in the Temple was also set aside. The generation that didn't see the glory of God in Jesus Christ was cut off from the blessing of God. And whoever does not recognize the glory of God before Jesus Christ comes in blazing glory will know a Christless, Godless eternity. That is serious, because when someone fails to glorify God, Romans 1:28 says that God gives them over to a reprobate mind. And that is a doomed existence.

We are to glorify God because of the consequences of not doing that and because we are commanded to. As we focus on glorifying God, we will be changed into the image of Christ from one level of glory to the next. That is the process of spiritual growth.

E. The Progression of Spiritual Growth

First John 2:12-14 is an essential text because it lists the three basic levels of spiritual growth. Our Lord speaks of those levels from an agricultural analogy: the seed, the corn, and the full ear of corn

(Mk. 4:28). John approaches the same subject from the analogy of physical human growth. In verse 12 he says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." John sums up all believers under one term--little children, or offspring. The Greek word used in verse 12 for children simply refers to anybody born from somebody else. It has nothing to do with age. That word could refer to someone who is eighty-five years old. It has nothing to do with infancy.

Then John moves to different terms. He divides the children of God into three categories. In verses 13-14 he says, "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children [lit. "babies," a completely different Greek word than in verse 12], because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Those are the three levels of spiritual growth: little children, young men, and fathers.

1. LITTLE CHILDREN

What is a spiritual little child? Verse 13 says, "...I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." What is the first thing a child recognizes? Parents. The spiritual child realizes that he is a child of God, and not much else.

2. YOUNG MEN

The second level of spiritual growth is found in verse 13, "...I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one..." Who is the wicked one (Gk. *hōponeros*)? Satan himself. How do you overcome Satan? Verse 14 says, "...because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Notice that a little child does not have the Word of God abiding him strongly--he only knows the basics. Consequently, they are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine..." (Eph. 4:14). In other words, they just know about God and Jesus. They don't know Scripture very well. That's why we teach that when you lead someone to Christ, the first thing you need to do is to get him grounded in the Word so that he doesn't get tossed around with false doctrine.

A spiritual young man is one who is strong in the Word and has overcome the wicked one. But in what sense does he overcome the wicked one? Satan is a liar (Jn. 8:44), appears as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), and is the master of false religion. But a spiritual young man knows the Word and is no longer a victim of false religion. When I became a spiritual young man, I knew the difference between a young man and a babe. When I was a spiritual babe, I couldn't understand what was true and what wasn't--I was lost in the euphoria of loving the Lord. I never understood much theology, so I was easily victimized by someone's teaching. But there came a time when I understood the Word of

God, and then false doctrine didn't deceive me; it just made me angry. I have disciplined people who have reached that level of maturity. They are ready to fight the cults and straighten out the world.

3. FATHERS

There is even a greater level of spiritual growth than spiritual young men. In verse 13 John says, "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning...." It is one thing to know that you belong to the family of God, and to know the Word of God, but it is another thing to know God intimately. It is one thing to know the Bible, but it's another thing to know the God behind the Bible. Spiritual growth progresses from knowing that you are a Christian, to knowing the Word of God, to knowing God Himself.

The way to know God is to spend your life focusing on His glory. That is what will take you to the third level of spiritual growth. The focus of the believer's life is to glorify God--to understand the fullness of His person and His glory. That focus then becomes a magnet that draws the believer past the point of knowing to Whom he belongs, to knowing what he believes, and finally to knowing the One he believes in. That is the thrust of all spiritual maturity. Paul put it this way: "...all things were created by Him, and for Him" (Col. 1:16). He even made us for Himself so that we might know Him in His fullness. Romans 11:36 says, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen."

As you focus on the glory of God and begin to give Him the honor He is due, you will find that you are being changed into His very image from one level of glory to the next. That is spiritual growth. In our next study, you will learn how to unlock your own potential for spiritual growth.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are two Scriptures that show the importance of spiritual growth?
2. Why does spiritual growth have nothing to do with a person's position in Christ?
3. Why does spiritual growth have nothing to do with God's love?
4. Why does spiritual growth have nothing to do with how long a person has been a believer?
5. If knowledge alone is not a key measurement of spiritual growth, what part does knowledge play in spiritual growth?
6. Why does spiritual growth have nothing to do with a person's activity in the church?

7. Give a simple definition of spiritual growth.
8. Where can you find the master key to spiritual growth? What is that master key?
9. What is the chief end of the created universe? Support your answer.
10. What does God give in exchange for the glory that man gives Him?
11. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, what happens to believers as they focus on the glory of the Lord?
12. What is the power behind spiritual growth? Explain how that power generates spiritual growth.
13. What is the ultimate reason for the condemnation of men? Support your answer.
14. What has God attempted to do throughout history?
15. What word did the Hebrews use for the presence of God?
16. Why were Adam and Eve cut off from experiencing the presence of God's glory?
17. Explain how God used Moses to present His glory to the people of Israel. (see Ex. 33:22-23; 34:29)
18. How did the people of Israel eventually respond to God's glory? What happened to the first generation of Israelites from Egypt?
19. According to Ezekiel 8:7-10, what did the people of Israel eventually do after God had revealed His glory to them in the Temple? According to Ezekiel 10:18-19 and 11:22-23, what was God's response?
20. In what way did Jesus Christ reveal the glory of God to man? (see Jn. 1:14)
21. When will God ultimately receive the glory He is due?
22. How is the glory of God displayed to men today? Support your answer.
23. What is man saying about God when he doesn't give Him glory?

24. What one thing keeps man from giving glory to God? (see Jer. 13:15)
25. What did God do to Nebuchadnezzar for him to see His glory? (see Dan. 4:32-33)
26. How did the Apostle John characterize all believers? Explain. (see 1 John 2:12)
27. How did John define a spiritual little child? a spiritual young man? a spiritual father? (see 1 Jn. 2:13-14)

Pondering the Principles

1. Review the section on the misconceptions about spiritual growth. (see pp. 1-3) Which of those misconceptions are in reality a result of spiritual growth? Why? Which of those misconceptions are true of a believer whether he is growing or not? Why? Do any of those misconceptions relate to your own attitude about your spiritual growth? Which ones? Why?
2. Do you think your spiritual growth glorifies God? Why or why not? What are some practical ways that your life can glorify God? Make a list of your ideas. After each idea, list the practical steps that you might implement in order to fulfill that particular idea. Spend time in prayer over each of those ideas, seeking God's guidance.
3. Does your church glorify God? Why or why not? What are you doing personally to manifest God's glory in your church? What should you be doing that you are not doing now? Be sure to pray for your church, and especially for your leaders. God will hear your prayer. Memorize Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end...."
4. Are you a spiritual little child, young man, or father? (see 1 Jn. 2:13-14) Look up the following verses: Romans 8:15-16; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18. What did you receive when you became a child of God? All Christians begin as little children, but they are not to remain as little children. Why? If you are still a little child, perhaps you are not desiring the pure milk of the Word. If you want to grow, you need to study God's Word on a regular basis. Look up the following verses: Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 6:11-12, 17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17. According to those verses, what does the spiritual young man depend on in his battle against the forces of Satan? What are you depending on? Look up the following verses: John 17:3; Philippians 3:10-15.

What is the ultimate goal of every Christian? Do you share that goal? How can you best progress toward an intimate knowledge of God, your Father? Make the commitment to press on toward that mark.

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