

CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." – Rom. 8:11.

There is a philosophy in the growth and development of Christian character, just as truly as in the growth and development of vegetation; and the more thoroughly we acquaint ourselves with the natural processes and conditions of development and growth in either case, the better we will understand how to cultivate and to secure the desirable end – maturity and luxuriant fruitfulness. The farmer who puts into practice only what he has learned by accident, and that in a haphazard way, and only goaded to effort by sheer necessity, cannot expect the fruitful fields, abundant harvests and well-earned approbation of the enterprising, thrifty farmer who has made a study of the business and brought knowledge, carefully gleaned, together with enterprise and energy to his assistance in the work.

Take for example a tree. If you know nothing about its cultivation, do not realize the necessity for it, and simply plant it and let it alone, its strength, instead of producing fruit, will generally go to making wood and leaves; worms and decay may attack its roots, insects may sting and blight its scanty fruitage; and if it continue to stand, it will only be a useless, fruitless cumberer of the ground, an advertisement of the farmer's negligence, and worthy only of having the ax laid to its root. Had it been pruned and trimmed, and kept free from insects, etc., under the blessing of God's air and rain and sunshine, it would have been a fruitful, creditable tree; for the laws of nature are true and faithful in all their operations.

And none the less true are the operations of moral law in the growth and development of moral character. Under proper conditions and with proper diligent cultivation, the character will grow and

develop, in accordance with fixed laws, and will become beautiful and fruitful in blessings to self and others; or, [R1114 : page 4] lacking the necessary cultivation, even under favorable natural conditions, it will be deformed, worthless and fruitless.

When we presented our bodies as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable through the merit of our Redeemer, we there received the spirit of adoption to the spiritual plane, as spiritual sons of God; and from that time the faculties and dispositions of our mortal bodies were reckoned as our new being, now under the direction and control of the Spirit of God. And the faithfulness with which we cultivate this reckoned new nature, by persistently weeding out old habits of thought and action, supplanting them with new virtues, and training them to activity in the divine service, is to prove our worthiness or unworthiness of the actual new nature to be received at the resurrection, to which perfect spiritual condition our present reckoned condition stands related as embryotic. And of course, the disposition and character of the embryo new creature will be the disposition of the perfected new creature when born in the resurrection.

The Apostle in the above text affirms, that if we really have the spirit of God in us – unless we quench or put it away from us – it will quicken our mortal bodies, make them alive toward God, active in growing into his likeness, and fruitful in Christian graces and activities. And again he adds, "If any man have not the spirit of God he is none of his," and that, "As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God." – Rom. 8:9,14.

It is our business, therefore, to grow, to cultivate in ourselves those dispositions which are worthy of us as spiritual sons of God, called to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

The Apostle Peter tells us how to proceed in this matter of cultivating Christian character, intimating that we cannot do it all in a day, or in a few days, but that it must be a gradual daily life-work, a

process of addition – adding virtue to virtue and grace to grace, day by day and hour by hour, saying: –

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperateness, and to temperateness patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." And then he adds, "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." – 2 Pet. 1:5-7-10.

This is a very strong assurance – that if we do these things we are *sure* to stand approved of God. We do well, therefore, to consider them with special care. Here are eight elements which must go toward making up the Christian character, the one to be added to the other and assimilated by the spiritual germ of the new nature, until the embryo new creature is formed, and then it must continue to grow and develop. Look at them again, They are –

Faith,	Patience,
Virtue,	Godliness,
Knowledge,	Brotherly kindness,
Temperateness,	Charity – Love.

Now for a little self-examination: Let each ask himself, (1) Have I the faith to which the Apostle here refers? – not faith in every thing or every person, but faith in God – in his plan of redemption through the vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and in all his rich promises built upon that sure foundation? Do I trust him implicitly? Is a "Thus saith the Lord" the end of all controversy, the solution of all doubts and the restful assurance in every perplexity?

(2) Am I endeavoring to lead a virtuous life? This to the child of God consecrated to be a living sacrifice, implies much more than merely abstaining from evil. It implies living truthfully, that is true to his covenant, which to wilfully violate would be equivalent to

swearing falsely. How we need to invoke the divine assistance here! and how critically to judge ourselves!

(3) Am I endeavoring from day to day to gain a more thorough and complete knowledge of God, of the great plan revealed in his Word, and of the special features now in operation, that I may cooperate with him in its execution, and of his will concerning *me* in the particular relationships and conditions in which I now stand – irrespective of my own will and disposition in any matter?

(4) Am I temperate – moderate in all things? – in eating, and drinking, and dressing, and home-arrangements, and conduct, and thoughts, and words, and deeds, and looks? "Let your moderation [temperateness] be known unto all men," says the apostle. Let men see, by our thoughtful, not rash and hasty but careful and considerate demeanor, in every affair of life, that we honor our profession.

(5) Am I patient under trial and discipline, keeping my feelings always under the control of enlightened reason, letting patience have its perfect work in cultivating the character, however severely the plow and harrow may break up the subsoil of the heart, meekly submitting to the discipline in every case?

(6) Am I carefully observing and endeavoring to pattern my character and course of action after the divine model? If a parent, or one in any position of authority, am I using that authority as God uses his? – not for selfish purposes, to make a boast of it, or to in any way oppress or trample upon the God-given individual rights of those under such authority, but for the blessing and advantage of those under it, even to the extent of self-denial, – with patience, dignity and grace, and not with boastful imperiousness which is the attitude of tyrants?

If a son, or one under authority to any extent, do I consider the example of loyal and loving obedience furnished in the example of our dear Lord? His delight was and is to do the Father's will at any cost to himself. As a man under the kingdoms – authorities – of this world,

and as a youth under the authority of earthly parents, he was loyal and faithful (Matt. 22:21; Luke 2:51), yet all of this earthly authority was exercised by his personal inferiors, though they were his legal superiors. How beautifully we will be able to grace and fill whatever station we occupy in life, if we carefully study and copy godliness – God-likeness, whether we be princes or peasants, masters or servants.

(7) Does brotherly kindness characterize all my actions? does it make due allowance for the inherited weaknesses and circumstantial misfortunes of others? Does brotherly kindness deal patiently, and helpfully so far as wisdom in view of the correction of those faults, may dictate? and that, even at the expense of self-interest, if necessary and prudent?

And if, as I look myself squarely in the face, I recognize deformity of character, do I thankfully accept a brother's proffered aid and meekly bear reproof, determining that by the grace of God I will overcome such dispositions, and prove myself a help rather than a hindrance to others, if it should even cost my life to do it, and that I will no longer foster my old dispositions, but plunge into activity in the service of God with those who should have my co-operation in service, instead of my burden?

(8) Have I charity – love unfeigned – for the unrighteous and unlovely, as well as for the good and the beautiful? – a love which is ever ready to manifest itself in wise and helpful activity for saint and sinner; a love which pities, and helps, and comforts, and cheers, and blesses all within its reach; which longs for the grand opportunities and power and glory of the incoming age, *chiefly* for its privileges of scattering universal blessing; and which, in harmony with that sentiment, utilizes every present opportunity wisely, and in harmony with the divine plan, for the accomplishment of the same end – thus manifesting and cultivating the disposition which must be found in every member of that glorious company which shall constitute the King's cabinet in the incoming age? If this disposition is not begun,

cultivated and developed here, we will not be considered worthy of that honor and office then.

And just as in the cultivation of vegetation, watchfulness, and the necessary precautions to prevent blight and decay and to guard against the intrusions of evil powers and influences calculated to sap its life, pruning, trimming and cultivation are necessary to accomplish the desired end of fruitfulness. By resisting the devil he will flee from us, and by patient continuance in well doing, an increasing measure of development will result.

"If these things be in you and abound," says Peter – That is, if you have them in some measure, and keep on cultivating them, so that they abound more and more and rule in you, "they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The truth is for such: "Light is sown for the righteous," and they are sure to get it. They shall not walk in darkness. If any man will *do* the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine. (John 7:17.) "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has *forgotten* that he was purged from his old sins."

"Wherefore, brethren, *give diligence* to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things [if you diligently cultivate this disposition] ye shall *never fall.*" Being justified fully by faith in the sacrifice of Christ for your redemption, and thus sanctified (set apart from the world and devoted to the service of God) by the truth, your final selection to that position of glory, honor and service, to which you are called, shall be *sure*. And [R1115 : page 4] "so, an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

"Wherefore," again says our beloved brother Peter, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things. Yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.... Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able

after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." This he did, and the church to this day may profit by his brotherly counsel.

While the Apostle Peter, addressing the consecrated, thus clearly and explicitly points out the way in which we may make our calling and election sure to the chief favor of God, the apostle Paul, addressing the same class, shows that neglect to develop and cultivate the Christian character involves not only the loss of the chief favor of our high-calling, but eventually of all favor, if wilfully and continually neglected. He wrote: "If ye [ye who have solemnly covenanted to sacrifice your *very life* in the service of God, for the eradication of evil] live after the flesh [with selfish effort, merely to gratify self] ye shall die." (Rom. 8:13.) God has no use nor place for wilful covenant-breakers and covenant-despisers, after they have been brought to a knowledge of the truth and of his will, and have covenanted to do it faithfully.

With all our striving and watchfulness, however, we shall not be able, in our present condition, to reach our ideal. Perfection is something which can only be approximated in the present life. But the measure of our effort to attain it will prove the measure of our faithfulness and **[R1115 : page 5]** earnest desire to do so. And that effort will not be unfruitful. If no fruit appears, we may be sure that little or no effort is made at cultivation, pruning, etc. The fruit will not only appear in the development of the Christian graces of character, but also in increasing activities. We must not wait for our spiritual and immortal bodies, promised us in our resurrection, before our activity in God's service begins. If we possess the spirit [the will, the disposition] of that new nature our mortal bodies will be active in the service of God's truth now. Our feet will be swift to run his errands, our hands prompt to do his bidding, our tongues ready to bear testimony to the truth, our minds active in devising ways and means to do so more and more abundantly and effectively. And thus we shall be living epistles known and read of all about us.