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## THE LAW OF DEVELOPMENT.

**"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." – 1 Cor. 13:11.**

SPIRITUAL law is as fixed in its principles and operations as is physical law. If it were not so the physical could not be so frequently used as it is for illustrations of spiritual things. Thus, for instance, in spiritual life, as revealed in the Scriptures, we have duplicated that principle so well known in physical law, of growth and development – first the blade, then the ear, and afterward the full corn in the ear; first the infant, then the boy, and afterward the full grown man; first the babe in Christ, then the growing child, the young man, and finally the full stature of a man in Christ. (Heb. 5:13,14; 1 John 2:12-14; Eph. 4:13-15.) In both cases there is also a marked similarity in the process of development. As in nature both plant and animal life are sustained by appropriate nourishment, food, light, heat, air, etc., – thus strengthening them to perform the various functions of their being, so the spiritual new creatures in Christ must have and appropriate proper nourishment that they may continue to live and grow. There is this difference, however, to be observed between the physical and the spiritual life in the processes of development; viz., that the former matures quickly, while the latter is of slow growth – a plant to bloom in eternity.

As new creatures in Christ – babes in the family of God – we realize our adoption as sons only when we have renounced the vain pomp and glory of this world and turned fully to God, claiming no righteousness of our own, but humbly accepting the imputed righteousness of Christ. No one is even a babe in Christ who still cherishes iniquity in his heart, or who fails to recognize his need of the covering of Christ's righteousness. But having been converted, [R1906 : page 289] turned about, from sin to God and righteousness, having learned of Christ, having put off the old man (the carnal, sinful disposition) and put on the

new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24), and having been renewed in the spirit (disposition) of our minds, we are reckoned sons of God, babes in Christ. And from that infantile standpoint, which has in it, undeveloped, all the elements of the man, the duty and privilege of such is to grow, to develop as new creatures in Christ. We are not to content ourselves with the lisplings and prattlings of infancy, nor with the milk diet suitable to that age, but, making due use of these as stepping-stones, we should go on unto perfection.

It was in view of such considerations that the Apostle penned the words of our text. He himself had rapidly passed on from the early stages of Christian character to higher degrees of development, and yet he was not counting that he had attained the perfection which was the mark at which he was aiming. (Phil. 3:13,14.) He had, however, passed beyond both infancy and boyhood to the stature of a young man in Christ. Looking back over the pathway of his Christian experience, he recognized these different stages, and for our profiting recorded his thought, saying, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

This was true both of his natural life and his spiritual life – the reference being specially to the latter, of which the former was merely an illustration. By the illustration he would draw our attention to the fact that if we have been **[R1907 : page 289]** children of God for some time we should be able, on looking backward over our Christian experience, to trace a good degree of advancement toward the mark of perfection. While as mere babes in Christ our hearts must always be loyal to God and true to righteousness, our very inexperience causes us often to stumble: our knowledge of the right ways of the Lord is very imperfect, and our powers of discernment are very unskilled: we have much to learn both of revelation and experience. The child in Christ has its own childish understanding, thoughts and ways, and his brethren in Christ should not expect from him the wisdom of the sage. Nor should he

himself presume to have such wisdom; for only through knowledge and the discipline of experience does wisdom come; and then, only when we have allowed them to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

For our growth and development in the Christian character God supplies all that is needful in the way of nourishment, and it is our part to make use of all the help he sends. By study and meditation upon his Word of truth, by prayer and communion with God, we partake more and more of his spirit, and are led into a closer acquaintance both with the Lord himself, and also with his works and ways. And by exercise of the strength thus gained in active service of the Lord, we are prepared to receive more and more of the fulness of his grace, and so to go on from grace to grace, and from one degree of advancement to another.

But notwithstanding these recognized principles of Christian growth and development, it is a lamentable fact that many who can point with exactness to the day and hour when first they gave their hearts to the Lord and received the holy spirit, the seal of their adoption, are compelled to realize, when they consider the matter at all, that, instead of advancing toward the stature of men in Christ, they have actually retrograded. Often such painfully look back to the blessedness of that first experience of the grace of God in their hearts, and say:

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I sought the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?"

It is a thing of the past with them, and its joys have fled. Why is this? It is because they have failed to appropriate the means of grace which God has supplied, and because, instead of striving against the downward tendencies of the carnal nature, they have allowed those old dispositions to rise up and reassert themselves. In some cases a morbid desire for something new and strange has led away from the truth into the forbidden paths of human speculation – philosophy and science, so called – until the mind became bewildered and confused in the labyrinths

of error – the snares of the wicked one. In other cases the measure of truth possessed has been held in unrighteousness. The tongue has been permitted to wag in the service of sin and uncleanness, manifesting unkindness, lack of Christian courtesy and forbearance, evil surmisings, self-exaltation, pride, boastfulness, vaunting, etc., etc. And these unholy indulgences have been excused and even cultivated; they have not been striven against nor repented of; hence the spiritual decline.

It is for these causes that the blessed sense of fellowship and communion with God, experienced when first the holy spirit set the seal of adoption upon the heart, has been lost by many. God cannot dwell in a heart so unfit for his presence. And no Christian can look back to the time of his first experience as a child of God and recall any such evil disposition at that time. Had his heart been in such a condition then, God would not have accepted him; and it is only as we strive against sin that we can continue to abide in his love and favor.

Who cannot look back to his first experience in the Christian life and remember how the love of God filled his heart and overflowed toward all his creatures, especially to them of the household of faith – a love that could bear well the beautiful description of 1 Cor. 13:4-7. "Charity [love] suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; **[R1907 : page 290]** beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Realizing such to be the will of God, this was the attitude of heart which the seeker after God sought to attain. And such an attitude he was enabled to realize when the spirit of adoption sealed him as an accepted son of God. Yet God, who remembers that we are dust, that we are morally weak from the fall, knew with what difficulty we must endeavor to maintain this condition of heart and mind when assailed by temptations, and worn with the disappointments and trials of life. Nevertheless, he does look for the cultivation of these graces of character

in us. He does, and has a right to, expect us to *strive* to live godly, and to war a good warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. And, therefore, notwithstanding the facts of trials and temptations, the maturer growth of Christian character should find our first love deepened into a more steady, constant and enduring thing, not characterized, perhaps, with so much of the gush and fluster of youth, but rather with the mellow benedictions of a more nearly ripened character.

That the Church in this sifting and proving time will be individually tested as to character, as well as to faith, is certain. The prospective heirs of the Kingdom must, like their Lord, be tried and tested in every point; and it behooves everyone, therefore, to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, and diligently to cultivate such a character as will stand every test applied to it. But in the hour of testing let none mistake love of *peace* for love of *righteousness*. Let us see to it that the same mind dwells in us that is in Christ, our pattern. So shall we be children of God, beloved and owned of him.

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