

This is the difficult part of Christian life, both in discovery and in actual practice. You see, most churches appear to have no idea what spiritual growth is. This writer himself was very surprised to discover that it meant something completely different than he had been led to expect by years of churchgoing and different writings from purported teachers of the Bible. So, the very meaning of spiritual growth, even the bare fact of it, is sometimes lost to many of those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ. What of it then?

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you [in order] *that* you should go and *bear fruit*, and that your fruit should *remain*, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

John 15:16 (NKJV)

Of course, there is no fruit-bearing without growth first. The above passage is clear that we are saved in order to “bear fruit,” as our Lord called it. So, we can conclude that we are responsible to grow too, since in keeping with the metaphor used, we cannot bear fruit unless we grow to a minimum level of maturity that allows us to do so, as we see with plants, from which the metaphor is derived.

<sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may *grow* thereby, <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

1 Peter 2:2-3 (NKJV)

As Peter says above, if we have tasted of the Lord’s grace, that is, if we have received His gracious gift of salvation, which we in no way at all merit and simply cannot merit, then our job is to “grow.” This growth is obviously spiritual growth, if we consider this passage in 1 Peter along with John 1:12 and John 3:3-8. As these passages together say, by believing the Gospel, we are born anew/again/from above as children of God, and when we see that we are children of God, then we should grow up too. It is clearly God’s will that we grow up from being infants. We are not supposed to remain at the point of only believing the Gospel.

We also see from the earlier passage in John 15 that the Lord Jesus chose us so that we would bear lasting fruit. That is the goal of His choice of us. As we have seen too, spiritual growth is commanded of us too, so that we can fulfill this Purpose of the Lord’s for us.

Peter is clear that spiritual growth occurs only by the Word of God. So, spiritual growth must be understood as a synonym for tutoring in the Bible’s teachings (cf. Hebrews 5:13-14). Whether it is called milk for babies as in 1 Peter 2:2 and Hebrews 5:13 as well as 1 Corinthians 3:2 or meat/solid food as in 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:14, it is the Bible’s teachings that are referred to. But, it can be understood that these passages necessarily teach that there is a difference between Bible teachings: some are easier to handle than others. In the early days of salvation (or as long as one has not learned more from the Bible than the Gospel), some Bible teachings will be easier to understand and live by than others. But as we learn more and believe what we learn, we will find ourselves advancing into depths that we may not have even fathomed.

<sup>9</sup> They must keep hold of the *deep truths* of the faith with a clear conscience.

### 1 Timothy 3:9 (NIV)

God's will then is that we should learn what the Bible teaches and not just the elementary things, but also the much more advanced things, so that we can "bear lasting fruit" in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we conclude that spiritual growth is growth in understanding and faith in the Bible's teachings. The following passage demonstrates this rather succinctly:

<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until **we** all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become **mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be **infants**, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)

The above passage speaks of both corporate maturity for the whole body of Christ and individual maturity for individual believers. On the one hand, regardless of what individual believers aspire to and attain individually, the Lord will have for Himself a bride who has prepared herself adequately for her husband (Revelation 19:7). There is no doubt of that. So, collectively, we will still become a mature organization, perfect and acceptable to our Lord even if the vast majority of Christians only make small contributions toward the growth, maturity, and production of others and never grow to maturity themselves (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15; Colossians 1:24). On the other hand, we are fully expected to individually grow up spiritually so that we can all contribute significantly to each other's spiritual growth and production for the Lord.

Not only have we seen that it is the Lord's will for us to grow spiritually to maturity, that is, to the point of being able to bear any substantial fruit or to do the "works of service" of which Paul speaks here in verse 12, we also see that He has made all the provision necessary for it. As we discuss this subject of spiritual growth going forward, we will find that we will get more and more into the meaning of this dense passage in Ephesians 4.

In conclusion, after we have been saved, what God commands of us next is that we learn all that He has to teach us in the Bible, so that we can "bear fruit" or do "works of service" just as He wants us to do.