Grow, Christian Grow!

(God's Plan for Spiritual Maturity)
Selected Scriptures
8/17/03



Introduction: Hebrews 5:11-6:1

**** It is God's will that all believers grow into Christ-likeness progressively throughout our lives***

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(1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18)



B. **You will grow, if you maintain <u>GOOD HEALTH (HOLINESS)</u>**
(1 Peter 2:1)

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(Psalms 37:7; Psalms 27:14; Isaiah 40:31; John 15:4)

D. **You will grow, If you obtain <u>CONSISTENT EXERCISE (SERVICE)</u>**
(2 Thessalonians 1:3b)

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Introduction: Hebrews 5:11-6:1

Hebrews 6:1 says to *"go on unto perfection"* (completion or maturity). "Go on" = be carried onto - passive (God moves us on!)

The writer in chapter five described how Christ was superior to the Old Testament priesthood and the writer was about to compare Him with the Old Testament priest and king Melchizedek, but abruptly stopped to interject a parenthetical warning (exhortation).

A. Complacency can cause spiritual dullness (v. 11)

The saying "use it or lose it" could apply to these believers ("Evangelize or fossilize"). Because of neglect, they became apathetic and lazy - acquired an inability to perceive the Word of God.

"Dull" - slow moving in mind; to be forgetful

Acts 7 - Stephen's message brought conviction - they stopped their ears (refusal to believe closes the ears).

Unbeliever = deaf
Backslider's ears are dull of hearing spiritually (calloused)

They became dull on their own (active tense).

Simple-mindedness necessitates simple explanations.

B. Complacency can cause stunted growth (v. 12-14)

"Age" alone does not produce maturity. Can't just say, "Give me time and I'll grow out of my hot temper, selfish ambitions, jealous spirit, etc."

ILLUS: of principal of school whose chose a teacher with ten years experience to fill an administrative job. Another teacher was upset and said, "I have 25 years of experience. Why wasn't I chosen?" The principal replied, "No, you are wrong. You do not! You just have one year of experience 25 times."

ILLUS: Stunted fish because of the lack of food/water conditions.

"First principles" - rudiments, A-B-C's, basics

Their need for a teacher indicates they never grew.
Their need for milk indicates they never grew (nothing wrong with milk, but something is wrong if you stay with only that - I Pet. 2:2)

ILLUS: New Britain Memorial Hospital: crippled/retarded people. Physical and mental retardation is a sad thing, but spiritual retardation is even sadder. It's inexcusable.

Typical of the book of Hebrews is the sharp contrasts which it makes of people. Verse 14 describes the Christian who does not need pre-digested food. He is of full age (mature). He has his senses exercised (trained).

"Who by reason of use" - habitual application of God's Word; stepping out by faith.

Result: Skillful perception; spiritual sensitivity

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V. 11- 14 - The writer of Hebrews (and God) feels the sorrow that a parent would feel if their child only matured so far.

V. 12

Every believer should eventually be equipped to teach - it's expected! (Jews who boasted of authority in spiritual matters [and thus obligated themselves] lacked ability).

They had been saved for some time (long time since conversion).

"To whom much is given, much is required" (accountability).

"Again" indicates that they were taught before.

Because they needed the basics taught to them, this shows that they even forgot simple A-B-C's/ Old Testament truths. They actually regressed, went backwards (like forgetting Greek or Hebrew if not acted upon and used).

Immaturity is revealed by the diet - ***"milk"***

V. 13
Note the use of sarcasm - equating them with infants.
A milk diet indicates inexperience.
The word of righteousness includes more than basic elements.

V. 14
Just as milk is for the infant, solid food is for the adult.

"Who by reason of use" - habitual application of the Word results in skillful character, disposition, or condition.

Increased knowledge of the meat of the Word results in increased perception, sensitivity in spiritual matters.

Perception comes through habitual exercise.

Spiritual perception is for distinguishing between good and bad (like the banker who knows counterfeit money because of habitual contact with the real thing).

Applications for 5:11-14 -

These Hebrews were going through same experiences year after year. Today many Christians suffer from prolonged adolescence, merging into premature senility! They come to church and sit, soak, and sour!

They had no answers to help anyone else out of a problem (ILLUS: of Harold Camping, who can't explain the simple gospel).

A mark of immaturity is:

1) Inability to instruct others
2) Inability to discern good from evil (EX: Galatians)
   --they are doctrinally undiscerning
   --give in to passing theological fads
   a. Some are emotionally gullible - moved by emotional appeal, hence are personality followers
   b. Some are intellectually gullible - attracted to speakers who sound great - but tie in philosophy, human logic, etc.

Immaturity is costly! You lose out on deep truths you are to be knowing and living. Your people will lose out (if you are a pastor).

Birth is Instantaneous; Growth is progressive (The new birth occurs at the moment of faith in Christ; Spiritual maturity is a life-long process)

As one matures he/she will tend to look more & more like his/her parents. What should a believer look like (in terms of spiritual character & conduct?) Answer: Jesus Christ

Acts 11:26 - And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Galatians 4:19 - My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

Ephes. 4:13 - Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

1 John 3:2 - Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

**** It is God's will that all believers grow into Christ-likeness progressively throughout our lives***

I. The Cause of Spiritual Growth: GOD (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

Growth is not produced by self effort alone

"We are bound" - we are obligated; we owe it to God.

The reason why god must be thanked is because He is the One who granted the Thessalonians their salvation,a nd He is the One who is active in their sanctification.

"Because" - Paul's reason for thanking God always (even after someone's salvation) is because of the great work God does in those who belong to Him.

The Apostle thanks God specifically for 2 things that the Lord gave to the Thessalonian Christians: He thanks God for their growth in 1)*"faith"* and2)*"charity"* (love)

While tribulation does cause one's true colors to show, such afflictions don't have to dampen our faith or dry up our love; these virtues can actually be enhanced by such hardship.

II. The Catalyst for Spiritual Growth: YOUR LOCAL CHURCH (Ephesians 4:15)

Note the words in the context which speak of growth:
"perfect" (v. 13)
"fullness" (v. 13)
"no more children" (v. 14)
"grow up" (v. 15)
"increase" (v. 16)
"edifying" (v. 16)

Ephesians 4:12 - Why does God distribute gifts?

The Pastor-teacher

1) Equips the Saints

2) To minister to others

3) To edify (build up) the Body

"Perfecting" -
2 ideas in one word:

1)To repair (like a doctor)
a)Used of repairing broken bones
b)Used of mending broken fishing nets
c)Used of restoring an erring brother (Gal. 66:1)

2)To equip (like a coach)
To furnish (II Tim. 3:17) or outfit. To provide what is necessary for the task.

"For the work of the ministry" - for the work of serving ("diakonia")

The work of the evangelist and pastor-teacher is to get every believer involved in serving (whether in an official or unofficial capacity)

The goal of preaching is not to simply educate God's people; it's to motivate them to serve!

Preaching is to be not only doctrinal but practical.

Every Christian is saved to serve (Eph. 2:10; I Cor. 15:58; I Pet. 2:5, 9; 4:10-11)

NOTE: God's progressive plan for His church:

"Edifying" - (i.e. edifice) building up; growth; both spiritual and numerical growth occur when everyone is using his/her gift in a ministry.

"The Body" is built up <u>externally</u> through evangelism and <u>internally</u> through discipleship and training.

Only the Word *"is able to build you up"!* (Acts 20:32)

A Body that has parts not working is a sick one.
Why grow?

1.We need to grow so that we would have <u>unity</u> (v. 13a)
(Growth promotes balanced harmony in the Body)

2.We need to grow so that we would have <u>maturity</u> (v. 13b)
(Growth builds and develops the Body)

3.We need to grow so that we would have <u>stability</u> (v. 14)
(Growth aids the protective defense system of the Body)

4.We need to grow so that we would have <u>ministry</u> (v. 15-16)
(Growth depends on each part doing its job in the Body)

<u>Growth depends on each part doing its job in the Body</u>

"Speaking" - the <u>mode</u> of our communication (We need to talk!)

"The truth" - the <u>content</u> of our communication (We must teach God's Word and not adulterate it)

"In love" - the <u>manner</u> of our communication (how we say it is just as important as what we say. Don't be obnoxious, rude, crude, abrasive, unthoughtful in defending the Truth)

"Grow up. . . in all things" - God desires that we grow in every way, totally, that we be well rounded.

Doctrinally (not riding hobby horses, or pet peeves, not single-issue-oriented)

"From whom" - the whole Body is connected to the Head and receives its directions from the Head.

--We are joined together (by the Holy Spirit - I Cor. 12:13)

--We are held together (compacted) by the joints (sinews or ligaments) which provide a supply of spiritual food to each part.

Just as in our human body each part does its share in aiding the growth of the rest of the Body, so it is in the Body of Christ.

Each believer via his connectedness to other believers imparts (passes on) spiritual nutrition to them.

"the edifying of itself" - the human body actually builds and mends itself. So will the church Body when each part does its ministry.

"Love" is the immunity system of the Body of Christ. Love fights off every spiritual virus Satan sends.

A. Speaking together (v. 15)
B. Working together (v. 16)

III. The <u>Conditions</u> for Spiritual Growth:

A. You will grow, if you receive <u>PROPER NUTRITION (BIBLE)</u> (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18)

2 Peter 3:18
But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.

1 Peter 2:2 - *"As newborn babes"* = as recently-born nursing babies.

Babies have a natural desire for milk. They are born with a natural instinct to suck. They crave milk. They can't make it without their "bottle."

Only milk satisfies the hunger of an infant. Those mothers who experienced the joy of 2:00 a.m. feedings know exactly what Peter means (Barbieri, p. 47).

Peter is not necessarily addressing young Christians; rather he is saying that all of us,, no matter how old in the Lord, should be like newly born babes and share their intense craving for milk.

"Desire" - Aorist imperative meaning to "begin desiring," to "start desiring."

Apparently, the people to whom Peter writes had lost their appetite for God's Word, so Peter exhorts them to regain it.

"Desire" - to long for; to crave; to have an intense hunger.

David had such a craving for God (Psalm 42:1-2 - *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"*).

SEE: Psalm 119:20, 40, 131. David was a man *"after God's own heart"* as evidenced by his love for God's Word (Ps. 119:47, 97, 127, 163, 165). God's Word was sweeter than honey (v. 103) and of more value than silver and gold (v. 72).

The fact that God commands us to have a *"desire"* for His Word, tells me that such "desire" is not always automatically in our hearts.

We need to be exhorted to "desire" God's Word.

The Bible is to the soul what milk is to the body.

The Word of God is pure, unadulterated, uncontaminated.
This word was used of corn, wheat, barley, oil, wine, and other farm products that were free of contamination (Reinecker, p. 750).

The Bible is genuine; it is pure. It only tells the truth, always; it will never deceive.

Because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it has no impurities or contaminants introduced by man.

"Milk" - the Bible is called "milk" because like milk it is a basic necessity to life. It nourishes our spiritual life, like milk nourishes our physical bodies.

Calling upon believers to crave the *"milk"* of the Word is by no means implying that believers were not mature enough to handle the *"meat"* of the Word (cp. Heb. 5:12-14; I Cor. 3:2). God is simply showing our need for the basic nutrition found in God's Word.

Why should believers consume the Word? ***"That [hina] you may grow thereby."***

Christian maturity comes only to those who have a daily intake of the Word of God.

You see, you mature as your faith grows; and your faith can only grow as you learn, trust, and obey God's Word (*"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing the Word of God"* - Rom. 10:17).

The word ***"grow"*** is passive, indicating that the growth is not self-induced.

Just as you have no control over you speed and rate of growth physically (you simply eat, sleep, and exercise, and somehow the growth process occurs irrespective of your desire to grow [Mt. 6:27]), so, if you consume God's Word, the Word will cause you to grow.

You cannot independently manufacture your own spiritual growth. God causes you to grow as you receive the needed nutrients of His Word.

The critical text reads: "that you may grow in respect to salvation."

NOTE: One does not grow into receiving salvation (obtaining salvation requires "birth" [the new birth], not growth). But one does grow into the benefits and blessings of his/her salvation (cp. Phil. 2:12) by a daily drinking of the Word.

You can measure your spiritual growth by the quantity of the Word you are drinking in daily:much milk - much growth
little milk - little growth
no milk - no growth

Our physical bodies drink milk and only grow to a certain level and then stop (EX: 6'2"). There is no limit, however, to the growth we experience by drinking in God's Word.

Your spiritual maturity as a Christian will increase in direct proportion to the amount of time, interest, and diligence you invest in the Word (cp. Barbieri, p. 47).

Unfortunately, Bible reading for many is like an "occasional snack" that barely provides any substantial fullness to our spiritual stomachs.

Col. 3:16 says, however, that you should *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom"*

How strong is your appetite for God's Word? You answer is "an index of your Christian health" (Hiebert, p. 124).

Do you want to know why you feel "weak" spiritually? Why you have no power over your fleshly impulses? Why you struggle to do what is right? etc. The reason is because you have neglected your milk!

There are a lot of spiritually malnourished, dehydrated, weak Christians struggling with their walk with the Lord. The reason: they are not drinking their milk.

B. You will grow, if you maintain <u>GOOD HEALTH (HOLINESS)</u>

1 Peter 2:1
Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

<u>Rid yourself</u> of the <u>sins</u> that <u>ruin your appetite</u> for the Word (v. 1)

"Sometimes children have no appetite because they have been eating the wrong things" (Wiersbe, p. 400).

Peter lists five villains that will rob your appetite for God's Word.

These are obvious road blocks to benefitting from the Word. Such sins will rob your thirst for the Word.

If your life is filled with sin, there will be no room for God's Word.

***"Laying aside"* =** to place away from oneself; to put off and discard; to strip off and throw away; to get rid of.

"Laying aside" - Aorist middle participle - "after laying aside; having laid aside"

This participle is connected to the imperative verb in v. 2, conveying the truth that before one will have a <u>desire</u> for the Word, he must first rid himself of the sins which rob one's appetite for the Word.

The old saying is true: "This Book [the Bible] will keep you from sin, but sin will keep you from this Book."

The word ***"all"*** occurs three times, showing that we cannot be content with a partial cleaning of our lives, but a total removal of the filth that dirties and defiles our souls.

"Malice" - evil, badness; a broad term for wickedness.

Peter uses this general "catch-all" term and uses the adjective ***"all"*** to show how believers should tolerate no form of badness in their lives. Anything that does not conform to God's moral law must be discarded.

"Malice" would include:

1) Bad feelings toward others (anger, lack of forgiveness)
2) Bad thinking (lusts, selfishness, etc.)
3) Bad actions

"Guile" - deceitfulness; the word means to catch with bait.

Any form of seduction; any form of entrapment; any trickery or deceitful words and actions so as to selfishly gain something from another person is guile (EX: how many men will "wine and dine," "butter up," pretend romance, and say words of "love" so as to manipulate to get what he wants).

Any form of deceit for selfish gain is wrong. People practice guile for financial gain, for sexual manipulation, for fame, power, and status, etc.

God's people are to be people of truth, sincerity, fidelity.

***"Hypocrisies"* =** play acting to pretend you are someone you are not. A hypocrite is someone who "wears a mask" with the intention of deceiving.

We, however, are to be sincere, real, genuine.

This does not mean that we should "spill our guts," and let the putrefying, disgusting feelings we have out (so as to ruin the lives of others who have to endure the stench of the sewage that pours out of our lives).

***"Envies"* -** this word describes one who holds a grudge against someone because they possess something that you yourself do not have.

Such ill feelings toward those who have something you do not is evil.

God calls a covetous spirit *"idolatry"* and it is a violation of the tenth commandment (Exod. 20:17).

[Envy may also be a desire that others do not get that which you yourself do not have.]

A misplaced desire for that which God has not given you will prevent you from desiring that which God does have for you - His Word.

***"Evil speakings"* -** slanderous speech; lit. to speak against or to speak down upon. To belittle; to degrade; to backbite; to devour someone with your words, to gossip about; to speak down upon;; to run someone down; to tear them down; to put someone down verbally.

(Most people put others down so as to lift themselves up)

Peter is speaking of a "vice that deliberately assaults the character of another and usually takes place behind the victim's back" (Hiebert, p. 122).

Don't be a character assassinator!

God says *"Speak not evil one of another, brethren."* He also says, *"If you bite and devour one another, take heed lest you consume one another."*

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth. . ."

God's pure word is totally incompatible with these attitudes and actions.

Such sin in the life of a Christian will immediately curdle any ingested milk, and will leave your life feeling sick and disinterested in "milk" consumption.

"Sinful attitudes and acts must be put out of the life before there will be any enjoyment of the Word" (Anderson, RBP, p. 34).

A spiritual enema must be taken to expel the toxic poisons from our system so that we will benefit from the milk of God's Word.

C. You will grow, if you receive ADEQUATE REST (WORSHIP)

Psalms 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him:

Psalms 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

D. You will grow, If you obtain CONSISTENT EXERCISE (SERVICE)

2 Thessalonians 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

"Your faith" - One's faith is the crux of the Christian life. The quality of your Christian life can be measured by the greatness of your faith.

Paul had previously been very concerned about the faith of the Thessalonians and was comforted to hear how strong it remained (I Th. 3:2-7, 10).

"Groweth exceedingly" - their faith had grown abundantly; literally - over and beyond normal [average] proportions.

1)Your faith is not static (it has the potential for change)

2)Your faith should never level off or go down, but should increase

"Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God's ways to strengthen our faith" (Wiersbe, p. 125).

3)Your faith can grow even in adverse circumstances

In fact, rarely does one's faith grow without hardships, trials, oppositions, etc.

"An easy life can lead to a shallow faith. The great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 all suffered in one way or another" (Wiersbe, p. 125)

I believe one of the reasons why God allows trials is to refine our faith (I Pet. 1:7 - *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*)

Another reason is to show us the genuineness of it (Ja. 1:2-3 - *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."*)

"A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted" (Wiersbe, p. 125)

How can tribulation increase our faith?

1. Tribulation reminds us of the Bible truth that we have an adversary (I Pet. 5:8)

2. Tribulation shows us our desperate need for God's help (strength and power)

3. Tribulation drives us into the Arms of our Heavenly Father

4. Tribulation helps us see things in perspective and live for things above (not temporal but eternal)

5. Tribulation helps us see God's faithfulness as He gives comfort and deliverance

"Charity" - (agape - sacrificial, giving love)
The love was reciprocal (a mutual, unselfish giving one toward another).
Each member (***"everyone")***
All members loved each other ***("you all")***

"Charity . . . aboundeth" - their love increased
This word "abound" means to increase or become greater in quantity.
How does love grow in quantity?
It's easy to understand how love can grow in quality (it becomes more unselfish, more unconditional, more sacrificial, etc.).

But how can love grow numerically in quantity?
1) You express it more often
2) You express it to more people

How can love increase in the midst of persecutions and tribulations?

*Tribulation creates needs and needs provide opportunity for others to meet their needs

(One of the "curses" of an affluent society is that there exists fewer opportunities to tangibly show that you care for someone)

When no one is hurt, no one is needed to help.
When no one is needy, no one is needed to give.
When no one is suffering, no one is needed to comfort.
(EX: When someone is ill or suffering material need, that is a golden opportunity to let them know you care)

I believe one of the reasons why God allows trials in people's lives (misfortunes, physical injury, sickness, and accidents, losses etc.) is to give us a chance (a chance we would not ordinarily have) to come to the rescue, to come to the aid -- to simply come! And offer practical help (I Jn. 3:18 - *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.")*

Conclusion:

Grow in God's Encouragment
2 Corinthians 1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

Grow in Giving
2 Corinthians 8:7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

Grow in Every Good Work
2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

Grow in your Love
Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

1 Thessalonians 3:12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

Grow a life that is increasingly pleasing to God
1 Thessalonians 4:1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.