

Spiritual Growth 12. Its Evidences

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Transcript

Spiritual Growth

12. Its Evidences

I

What are the principal marks of spiritual growth? what are the outstanding characteristics of the Christian's progress? To some of our readers that may appear a simple question, admitting of a ready answer. From one standpoint that is so, yet if we are to view it in its proper perspective, careful consideration is called for ere we make reply. If we bear in mind the real nature of spiritual growth and remember it is like that of a tree, downward as well as upward, inward as well as outward, we shall be preserved from mere generalizations. If, too, we take into account the three grades under which Christians are grouped, we shall be careful to distinguish between those things which, respectively, evidence growth in the "babes," in the "young men," and in the "fathers" in Christ. That which is suited to and marks the growth of a babe in Christ applies not to one who has reached a more advanced form in His school, and that which characterizes the full-grown Christian is not to be looked for in the immature one. It follows then that certain distinctions must be drawn if a definite and detailed answer is to be furnished to our opening inquiry. But since we have already written at some length on the three grades of Christian development and have sought to describe those features which pertain more distinctively to those in the stage of the "blade," the "ear" and "the full corn in the ear," there is no need for us now to go over the same ground. If it be borne in mind that growth is a relative thing, we shall see that the same unit of measurement is not applicable to all cases—as the yardstick is the best means for gauging the growth of children, but the weighing-scales for registering that of adults. Then too, if we take into consideration, as we should, differences of privilege and opportunity, of teaching and training, of station and circumstances, uniform progress should not be expected. Some believers have much more to contend against than others. It is not that we would limit the grace of God, but that we should recognize and take into account the distinctions which Scripture itself draws. The relative growth of one who is severely handicapped may be much greater in reality than that of another who in more favorable circumstances makes greater progress. The man who plants a fruit tree in a fertile valley is warranted to expect a better yield from it than one which is set in the soil of an exposed hillside. When a young Christian is favored with pious parents, or brothers and sisters who encourage him both by counsel and example, how much more may be looked for from him than another who dwells in the home of the ungodly. An unmarried woman who does not have to earn her living has much more opportunity for reading, meditation, prayer and the nurture of her spiritual

life, than one who has the care of a young family. One who is privileged to sit regularly under an edifying ministry has better opportunity for Christian progress than another who is denied such a privilege. Again, the man with two talents cannot produce as much as another with five, yet if the former gain another two by them he does just as well proportionately as the one who makes his five into ten. The Lord Himself takes note of such differences: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Let us also point out that we are not now going to write on the marks or signs of spiritual life as such, but rather of the evidences of the growth of spiritual life—a much harder task. When we endeavor to examine ourselves for them, it is of great importance that we should know what to look for. If the Christian expects to find an improvement in the "old man," he will most certainly be disappointed: if he looks for a waning of natural pride, a lessening of the workings of unbelief, a cessation of the risings within him of rebellion against God, he will look in vain. Yet how many Christians are bitterly disappointed over this very thing and greatly cast down by the same. But they ought not to be, for God has nowhere promised to sublimate or spiritualize the "flesh" nor to eradicate our corruptions in this life, yet it is the Christian's duty and privilege to so walk in the spirit that he will not "fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Though we should be deeply humbled over our corruptions and mourn for them, yet our painful awareness of the same should not cause us to conclude we have made no spiritual growth. An increasing realization of our native depravity, a growing discovery of how much there is within us that is opposed to God, with a corresponding despising of ourselves for the same, is one of the surest evidences that we are growing in grace. The more the light of God shines into our hearts, the more are we made aware of the filth and wickedness which indwell them. The better we became acquainted with God and learn of His ineffable purity, the more conscious do we become of our base impurity and bewail the same. That is a growing downwards or becoming less in our own esteem. And it is that which makes way for an increasing valuation of the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, and a more frequent betaking of ourselves to that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Thus, if Christ is becoming more precious to you, if you perceive with increasing clearness His suitability for such a vile wretch as you know yourself to be, and if that perception leads you to cast yourself more and more upon Him—as a drowning man does to a log—then that is clear proof you are growing in grace. Growth is silent and at the time imperceptible to our senses, though later it is evident. Growth is gradual and full development is not reached in a day, nor in a year. Time must be allowed before proof can be obtained. We should not attempt to gauge our growth by our feelings, but rather by looking into the glass of God's Word and measuring ourselves by the standard which is there set before us. There may be real progress even where there is less inward comforts. Am I denying myself more now than I did formerly? Am I less enthralled by the attractions of this world than I used to be? Are the details of my daily life being more strictly regulated by the precepts of Holy Writ? Am I more resigned to the blessed will of God, assured that He knows what is best for me? Is my confidence in God growing, so that I am more and more leaving myself and my affairs in His hands? Those are some of the tests we should apply to ourselves if we would ascertain whether or no we be glowing in grace. 1. Consider the work of mortification and seek to ascertain what proficiency you are making therein. There can be no progress in the Christian life while that work be unattended to. God does not remove indwelling sin from His people, but He does require them to make no provision unto its lusts, to resist its strivings, to deny its solicitations. His call is "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5), "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22), "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11), "keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). That is the lifelong task God has assigned us, for as long as we remain in this body the flesh will oppose from within and the world from without. If we become slack in the performance of this duty, sin and Satan will gain more and more of an advantage over us. But if we be

faithful and diligent therein our efforts, by the Spirit's enablement, will not be altogether in vain. But most of our readers, perhaps all of them, will exclaim, But this is the very matter in which I meet with most discouragement, and if I am honest it appears to me that my efforts are utterly in vain. Despite my utmost endeavors, my lusts still master me and I am repeatedly brought into captivity by sin. Though such be the case that does not mean your efforts were useless. God has nowhere promised that if you do so and so indwelling sin shall become inoperative or that your lusts shall become weaker and weaker. There is widespread misunderstanding on this subject. The word "mortify" signifies put to death, but it must be carefully borne in mind that it is used figuratively and not literally, for it is a physical term applied to that which is immaterial. Through no possible process can the Christian, not with the Spirit's help, render his lusts lifeless. They may at times appear so to his consciousness, yet it will not be long ere he is again aware that they are vigorous and active. The holiest of God's people, in all ages, have borne testimony to the power and prevalency in their corruptions, and that to their last hour. It needs then to be carefully defined what is meant by the word "mortify." Since it does not signify "slay or extinguish indwelling sin" nor "render lifeless your lusts," what is intended? This: die unto them in your affections, your intentions, your resolutions, your efforts. We mortify sin by detesting it: "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15) and just so far as we really hate our corruptions have we morally slain them. The Christian evidences his hatred of sin by mourning when it has gained an advantage over him. If it be his sincere intention and honest resolution to subdue every rising of his native depravity and the commission of every sin, then in the sight of Him who accepts the will for the deed, he has "mortified" them. Whenever the believer contritely confesses his sins to God and "forsakes" them so far as any purpose to repeat them is concerned, he has "mortified" them. If he truly loathes, grieves over, and acknowledges his failures to God, then he can say, "that which I do, I allow not" (Rom. 7:15). "The Lord seeth not as men seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7) needs to be borne in mind on this subject. "If a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her and lie with her, then the man only that lay with her shall die" (Deut. 22:25). In the verses which follow we read "there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death." Not only did she not consent hereto, but we are told "she cried, and there was none to save her." Now that has a spiritual application to us. If a believer is suddenly surprised by a temptation which is to something forbidden by God and his heart agrees not thereto, but offers a resistance, which is however unavailing, though he is not guiltless therein, yet his case is very different from that of the unregenerate who found the temptation agreeable and responded heartily thereto. Note how the Spirit has recorded of Joseph of Arimathea that though he was a member of the Sanhedrin which condemned Christ to death, yet he "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them" (Luke 23:51)! "What is sanctification? Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life" (Westminster Catechism). The words we have emphasized have occasioned much grief and anxiety to many, for measuring themselves by them they concluded they had never been sanctified. But it should be noted it is not there said that "sin is more and more dying in them," but that they "more and more die unto sin," which is a very different thing. Christians do, as pointed out above, die more and more to sin in their affections, intentions, and efforts. Yet we fail to find any warrant in Scripture for saying "the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened." Having sought to show what the word "mortify" does not denote in its application to the Christian's conflict with sin and what it does signify let us in a few words point out wherein the believer may be said to be making progress in this essential work. He

is progressing therein when he girds himself more diligently and resolutely to this task, refusing to allow seeming failure therein to cause him to give up in despair. He is making progress therein as he learns to make conscience of things which the world condemns not, being regulated by God's Word rather than public opinion or leaning to his own understanding. He is making progress therein when he obtains a clear insight of spiritual corruptions, so that he is exercised not only over worldly lusts and gross evils, but over coldness of heart, unbelief, pride, impatience, self-confidence, and thus he would cleanse himself from all filthiness of "spirit" as well as "of the flesh" (2 Cor. 7:1). In short, he is growing in grace if he be maintaining a stricter and more regular watch over his heart.

2. Consider the work of living unto God and seek to ascertain what proficiency you are making therein. The measure and constancy of our yieldedness and devotedness to God is another criterion by which we may ascertain whether or no we are really growing in grace, for to lapse into a course of self-pleasing is a sure symptom of backsliding. Am I increasingly giving up myself to God, employing my faculties and powers in seeking to please and glorify Him? Am I endeavoring, with intensified earnestness and diligence, to act in accordance with the surrender I made of myself to Him at my conversion, and to the dedication of myself to His service at my baptism? Am I finding deeper delight therein, or is His service becoming irksome? If the latter, then that is clear proof that I have deteriorated, for there has been no change in Him nor in His claims upon me. If love be healthy then my greatest joy will be in making Him my chief Object and supreme End, but if I seek to do so only from a sense of obligation and duty, then my love has cooled. "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Probably that means, in part at least, Let no compartment of your complex being be reserved or retained for self, but desire and pray that God may possess you wholly. Is that the deepest longing and endeavor of your heart? Are you finding increasing pleasure in the will and ways of the Lord? then you are following on to know Him. Are you making a more determined and continuous effort to "Walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10)? then that evidences you are growing in grace. Are you less influenced than formerly by how others think and act, requiring nothing less than a "Thus saith the Lord" for your monitor? then you are becoming more rooted and grounded in the faith. Are you more watchful against those things which would break, or at least chill, your communion with God? then you are going forward in the Christian life. To be increasingly devoted to God requires that I be increasingly occupied and absorbed with Him. To that end I need daily to study the revelation which He has made of Himself in the Scriptures, and particularly in Christ. I need also to meditate frequently upon His wondrous perfections: His amazing grace, unfathomable love, His ineffable holiness, His unchanging faithfulness, His mighty power, His infinite longsufferance. If I contemplate Him thus with the eyes of faith and love, then shall I be able to say "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord [the place of nearness and fellowship with him] all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). The one who can do that must perforce exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee" (Ps. 73:25). That, my reader, is not a mere rhetorical utterance, but the language of one whose heart has been won by the Lord.

3. Consider the Word of God and seek to measure yourself by the degree in which you really honor it. What place do the contents of the Sacred Volume have in your affections, thoughts, and life: a higher one than formerly, or not? Is that Divine communication more valued by you today than when you were first converted? Are you more fully assured of its Divine inspiration, so that Satan himself could not make you doubt its Authorship? Are you more solemnly impressed by its authority so that at times you tremble before it? Does the Truth come with greater weight, so that your heart and conscience is more deeply impressed by it? Are more of its very words treasured up in your memory and frequently meditated upon? Are you really feeding on it: appropriating it to yourself, mixing faith therewith, and being nourished by it? Are you learning to make it your Shield on which you catch and quench the fiery darts of the wicked?

Are you, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), bringing to this infallible Scale and weighing therein all you read and hear? Carefully bear in mind the purpose for which the Scriptures were given to us, the particular benefits they are designed to bestow. They are "profitable for doctrine," and their doctrine is far more than a theological treatise addressed to the intellect, or a philosophical system which furnishes an explanation of man's origin, constitution, and relation to God. It is "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3), every part of which is designed to exalt God and abase man, according to Him His rightful place over us and our dependence upon and subjection to Him. It is profitable for "reproof," to acquaint us with our innumerable faults and failures and to admonish us for the same. It is "a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12), probing into our innermost beings and condemning all within us which is impure. It is profitable for "correction," to teach us what is right and pleasing unto God; and such is its potency that the more we are regulated by it the more are our souls renovated and purified. It is profitable for "instruction in righteousness," for producing integrity of character and conduct. It is for the enlightening of our minds, the instructing of our consciences, the regulating of our wills. Now my reader, test yourself by those considerations, fairly and impartially. Are you finding the Scriptures increasingly profitable for the doctrine which is according to godliness: if so they are producing in you a deeper and more extensive piety. Are you more and more opening your heart to their "reproof," not confining yourself to those portions which comfort, and avoiding those parts which admonish and condemn you? If so then you are cultivating closer dealings with God. Are you increasingly desirous of being "corrected" by their searching and holy teachings? If so then you diligently endeavor to promptly put right whatever they show is wrong in you. Are they really instructing you in righteousness, so that your deportment is becoming in fuller conformity to their standard? If so you are more shunned by worldlings and less esteemed by empty professors. Do you frequently examine yourself by God's Word and test your experience by its teaching? If so, you are becoming more skilled in the Word of Righteousness (Heb. 5:13) and more pleasing to its Author. II

4. Consider your occupation with Christ and remember that growth in grace is commensurate with your growing in the knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18). That knowledge is indeed a spiritual one, yet it is received via the understanding, for what is not apprehended by the mind cannot profit the heart. Nothing but an increasing familiarity and closer fellowship with Christ can nourish the soul and promote spiritual prosperity. There can be no real progress without a better acquaintance with His person, office, and work. Christianity is more than a creed, more than a system of ethics, more than a devotional program. It is a life: a life of faith on Christ, of communion with Him and conformity to Him (Phil. 1:21). Take Christ out of Christianity and there is nothing left. There must be constant renewed acts of faith on Christ, yet our faith is always in proportion to the spiritual knowledge we have of its object. "That I may know him" precedes "and the power of his resurrection." Christ revealed to the heart is the Object of our knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), and our spiritual knowledge of Him consists in the concepts and apprehensions of Him which are formed in our minds. That knowledge is fed, strengthened, and renewed by our spiritual and believing meditations on Christ and those being made effectual in the soul by the power of the Spirit. The Object of our faith is a known Christ, and the better we know Him the more we shall act faith on Him. The Christian life consists essentially, in living on Christ: "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." The particular acts of this life of faith are beholding Christ (as He is presented in the Word), cleaving to Him, making use of Him, drawing from Him, holding free communion with Him, delighting ourselves in Him. Alas, the great majority of Christians seek to live on themselves and feed on their experience. Some are forever occupied with their corruptions and failures, while others are wholly taken up with their graces and attainments. But there is nothing of Christ in either the one or the other, and nothing of faith; rather does self absorb them and a life of sense predominates. All genuine "experience" is a knowing ourselves to be what God has described us in His Word and having such an inward realization

thereof as proves to us our dire need of Christ. It consists too of such a knowledge of Him as that He is exactly suited to our case and Divinely qualified and perfectly fitted for our every lack. No matter how "deep" may be your "experience," it is worth nothing unless it turns you to the great Physician. How often have we read in the diaries and biographies of saints, or heard them say, O what blessed enlargement of soul I was favored with, what liberty in prayer, how my heart was melted before the Lord, what joy unspeakable possessed me. But if those "mountain-top experiences be analyzed what do they consist of? what is there of Christ in them? It is not spiritual views of Him which engages their attention, but the warmth of their affections, a being carried away with their comforts. No wonder such ecstasies are so brief and are followed by deep depression of spirits. Measure your spiritual growth rather by the extent you are learning to look away from both sinful self and religious self. Christian progress is to be gauged not by feelings but by the extent to which you live outside of yourself and live upon Christ—making fuller use of Him, prizing him more highly, finding all your springs in Him, making Him your "all" (Col. 3:11). It is a consciousness of sin and not of our graces, the burden of our corruptions and not delighting ourselves in our enlargements, which will move us to look away from self and behold the Lamb. 5. Consider the path of obedience and what progress you are making therein. That which distinguishes the regenerate in a practical way from the unregenerate is that the former are "obedient children" (1 Peter 2:14), whereas the latter are entirely dominated by the carnal mind, which is "enmity against God, and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). The very first criterion given in the epistle which is written in order that believers may know they have eternal life is, "Hereby we know [are Divinely assured] that we know him [savingly], if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Conversion is a forsaking of the path of self-will and self-pleasing (Isa. 53:6) and a complete surrender of myself to the Lordship of Christ, and the genuineness thereof is evidenced by my taking His yoke upon me and submitting to His authority. If we truly submit to His authority then we shall seek to comply with all He enjoins and not pick and choose between His precepts. Nothing less than wholehearted and impartial obedience is required from us (John 15:14). If we do not sincerely endeavor to obey in all things, then we do not in any, but merely select what is agreeable to ourselves. Then is there any such thing as progress in obedience? Yes. We are improving in obedience when it becomes more extensive. Though the young convert has fully surrendered himself to the Lord, yet he devotes himself to some duties with more earnestness and diligence than he does to others, but as he becomes better acquainted with God's will, more of his ways are regulated thereby. As spiritual light increases he discovers that God's commandment is "exceeding broad" (119: 96), forbidding not only the overt act but all that leads to it, and inculcating (by necessary implication) the opposite grace and virtue. Growth in grace appears when my obedience is more spiritual. One learning to write becomes more painstaking, so that he forms his letters with greater accuracy: so as one progresses in the school of Christ he pays more attention to that word "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently" (119:4). So, too, superior aims and motives prompt him: his springs are less servile and more evangelical, his obedience proceeding from love and gratitude. That, in turn, produces another evidence of growth: obedience becomes easier and pleasanter, so that he "delights in the law of the Lord." Duty is now a joy: "O how love I thy law." 6. Consider the privilege of prayer and how far you are improving in that exercise. Probably not a few will exclaim, Alas, in this respect I have deteriorated, for I am neither as diligent in it nor as fervent as I used to be. But it is easy to form a wrong judgment upon the matter measuring it by quantity instead of quality. Devout Jews and Papists spend much time on their knees, but that is simply the religion of the flesh. There is often more of the natural than the spiritual in the devotional exercises of the young convert, especially if he be of a warm and ardent temperament. It is easy for enthusiasm to carry him away when new objects and interests engage him, and for emotionalism to be mistaken for fervor of spirit. Personally we very much doubt if the Lord's people experience any true progress in their

prayer life until they make the humbling discovery they know not how to pray, though they may have attained to considerable proficiency in framing eloquent and moving petitions as men judge. "We [Christians] know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26): did we realize that in our spiritual childhood? The first mark of growth here is when we are moved to cry, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). As the Christian grows in grace prayer becomes more of an attitude than an act, an act of dependence upon and confidence in God. It becomes an instinct to turn to Him for help, guidance, wisdom, strength. It consists of an increasing looking to and leaning upon Him, acknowledging Him in all our ways. Thus prayer becomes more mental than vocal, more ejaculatory than studied, more frequent than prolonged. As the Christian progresses his prayers will be more spiritual: he will be more intent upon the pursuit of holiness than of knowledge, he will be more concerned about pleasing God than ascertaining whether his name be written in the Book of Life, more earnest in seeking those things which will promote the Divine glory than minister to his comfort. As he learns to know God better his confidence in Him will be deepened, so that if on the one hand he knows nothing is too hard for Him, on the other he is assured that His wisdom will withhold as well as bestow. Again, growth appears when we are as diligent in praying for the whole household of faith as for ourselves or immediate family. Our heart has been enlarged when we make "supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18).

7. Consider the Christian warfare and what success you are having therein. Here again we shall certainly err and draw a wrong conclusion unless we pay close attention to the language of Holy Writ. That which we are called to engage in is "the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12), but if we seek to gauge our progress therein by the testimony of our senses a false verdict will inevitably be given. The faith of God's elect has the Scriptures for its sole ground and Christ as its immediate Object. Nowhere in Scripture has Christ promised His redeemed such a victory over their corruptions in this life that they shall be slain, nor even that they will be so subdued their lusts will cease vigorously opposing, no not for a season, for there is no discharge nor furlough in this warfare. Nay, He may permit your enemies to gain such a temporary advantage that you cry "iniquities prevail against me" (Ps. 65:3), nevertheless you are to continue resisting, assured by the Word of promise you shall yet be an overcomer. Satan's grand aim is to drive you to despair because of the prevalency of your corruptions, but Christ has prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and proof His prayer is being answered is that you weep over your failures and do not become a total apostate. The trouble is that we want to mix something with faith—our feelings, our "experiences," or the fruits of faith. Faith is to look to Christ and triumph in Him alone. It is to be engaged with Him and His word at all times no matter what we encounter. If we endeavor to ascertain the outcome of this fight by the evidence of our senses—what we see and feel within—instead of judging it by faith, then our present experience will be that of Peter's "when he saw the wind boisterous" while walking on the sea toward Christ, or we will conclude "I shall now perish" (1 Sam. 27:1). Did not Paul find that when he would do good evil was present within him, yea, that while he delighted in the law of God after the inward man, he saw another law in his members warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity, so that he cried "O wretched man that I am." That was his "experience," and the evidence of sense. Ah, but he did not, as so many do, stop there. "Who shall deliver me?" "I thank God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 7) he answered. That was the language of faith! Is it yours? Your success in this fight is to be determined by whether—despite all failures—you are continuing therein and whether you confidently look forward to the final issue—that you will triumph through Christ. If we received a letter from a native of Greenland's icy mountains asking us to give him as accurate and vivid a word picture as possible of an English apple-tree and its fruit, we would not single out for our description one that had been artificially raised in a hothouse, nor would we select one which grew in poor and rocky ground on some desolate hillside; rather would we take one that was to be found in average soil in a typical orchard. It is quite true the others would be apple trees and might bear fruit, yet if

we confined our word picture unto the portraying of either of them, the Greenlander would not obtain a fair concept of the ordinary apple tree. It is equally unfair and misleading to take the peculiar experiences of any particular Christian and hold them up as the standard by which all others should measure themselves. There are many kinds of apples, differing in size, color and flavor. And though Christians have certain fundamental things in common, yet no two of them are alike in all respects. Variety marks all the works of God. Above we have referred to seven different phases of the Christian life by which we may test our progress. In what follows we mention some of the characteristics which pertain more or less—for in germ form they are found in all—to a state of Christian maturity. Prudence. There is a well-known adage—though often ignored by adults—that "we cannot put old heads on young shoulders." That is true spiritually as well as naturally: we live and learn, though some learn more readily than others—usually it is because they receive their instruction from the Scriptures while others are informed only by painful experience. The Word says "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (146:3), and if we heed that injunction we are spared many a bitter disappointment; whereas if we take people at their word and count on their help, we shall frequently find that we leaned upon a broken reed. In many other ways the young convert's zeal becomes tempered by knowledge and he conducts himself more prudently. As he becomes more experienced he learns to act with greater caution and circumspection, and to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (Col. 4:5), as he also discovers the chilling effects which frothy professors have upon him, so that he is more particular in selecting his associates. He learns too his own peculiar weaknesses and in which direction he needs most to watch and pray against temptations. Sobriety. This can be attained only in the school of Christ. It is true that in certain dispositions there is much less to oppose this virtue, yet its full development can only be under the operations of Divine grace, as Titus 2:11, 12 plainly shows. We would define Christian sobriety as the regulation of our appetites and affections in their pursuit and use of all things—we can be righteous "over much" (Eccl. 7:16). It is the governing of our inward and outward man by the rules of moderation and temperance. It is the keeping of our desires within bounds so that we are preserved from excesses in practice. It is a frame or temper of the mind which is the opposite of excitedness. It is a being "temperate in all things" (1 Cor. 9:25). and that includes our opinions as well as conduct. It is a holy seriousness, calmness, gravity, balance, which prevents one becoming an extremist. It is that self-control which keeps us from being unduly cast down by sorrows or elated by joys. It causes us to hold the things of this life with a light hand, so that neither the pleasures nor the cares of the world unduly affect the heart. Stability. There is a spiritual childishness as well as a natural one, wherein the young convert acts more from impulse than principle, is carried away by his fancies, and easily influenced by those around him. To be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14) is one of the characteristics of spiritual immaturity, and when we waver in faith and are of a doubtful mind then we halt and falter in our duties. Even that love which is shed abroad in the hearts of the renewed needs to be controlled and guided, as appears from that petition of the apostle's "I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). As the Christian grows in grace he becomes "rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith" (Col. 2:7). As he grows in the knowledge of the Lord it can be said of him "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Ps. 112:7). He may be shaken, but will not be shattered by bad news, for having learned to rely upon God, he knows no change of circumstances can do more than lightly affect him. No matter what may befall him, he will remain calm, confident in his Refuge: since his heart be anchored in God his comforts do not ebb and flow with the creature. Patience. Here we must distinguish between that natural placidity which marks some temperaments and that spiritual grace which is wrought in the Christian by God. We must also remember that spiritual patience has both a passive and an active side to it. Passively, it is a quiet and contented

resignation under suffering (Luke 21:19), being the opposite of acting "as a wild bull in a net" (Isa. 51:20). Its language is "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Actively, it is a persevering in duty (Heb. 12:1), being the opposite of "turning back in the day of battle" (Ps. 78:9). Its language is "be not weary in well doing" (2 Thess. 2:13). Patience enables the believer to meekly bear whatever the Lord is pleased to lay upon him. It causes the believer to quietly await God's hour of relief or deliverance. It prompts the believer to continue performing his duty in spite of all opposition and discouragement. Now since it is tribulation (Rom. 5:3) and the trying of our faith (James 1:3) which "worketh patience," much of it is not to be looked for in the spiritually inexperienced and immature. We are improving in patience when more spiritual considerations prompt us thereto. Humility. Evangelical humility is a realization of my ignorance, incompetency and vileness, with an answerable frame of heart. As the young believer applies himself diligently to the reading of God's Word and acquires more familiarity with its contents, as he becomes better instructed in the faith, he is very apt to be puffed up with his knowledge. But as he studies the Word more deeply, he perceives how much there is therein which transcends his understanding, and as he learns to distinguish between an intellectual information of spiritual things and an experimental and transforming knowledge of them, he cries "that which I see not, teach thou me" and "teach me thy statutes." As he grows in grace he makes an increasing discovery of his ignorance and realizes "he knows nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). As the Spirit enlarges his desires, he thirsts more and more for holiness, and the more he is conformed to the image of Christ the more will he groan because of his sensible unlikeness to Him. The young Christian attempts to perform many duties in his own strength, but later on discovers that apart from Christ he can do nothing. The father in Christ is self-emptying and self-abasing and marvels increasingly at the longsufferance of God toward him. Forbearance. A spirit of bigotry, partisanship and intolerance is a mark of narrow mindedness and of spiritual immaturity. On first entering the school of Christ most of us expected to find little difference between members of the same family, but more extensive acquaintance with them taught us better, for we found their minds varied as much as their countenances, their temperaments more than their local accents of speech, and that amid general agreement there were wide divergences of opinions and sentiments in many things. While all God's people are taught of Him, yet they know but "in part" and the "part" one knows may not be the part which another knows. All the saints are indwelt by the holy Spirit, yet He does not operate uniformly in them nor bestow identical gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-11). Thus opportunity is afforded us to "forbear one another in love" (Eph. 4:2) and not make a man an offender for a word or despise those who differ from me. Growth in grace is evidenced by a spirit of clemency and toleration, granting to others the same right of private judgment and liberty as I claim for myself. The mature Christian, generally, will subscribe to that axiom "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." Contentment. As a spiritual virtue this is to have our desires limited by a present enjoyment, or to find a sufficiency in and be satisfied with my immediate portion. It is the opposite of murmurings, distracted cares, covetous desires. To murmur is to quarrel with the dispensations of Providence: to have distracted cares is to distrust God for the future: to have covetous desires is to be dissatisfied with what God has assigned me. God knows what is best for our good, and the more that be realized the more thankful shall we be for the allotments of His love and wisdom—pleased with what pleases Him. Contentment is a mark of weanedness from the world and of delighting ourselves in the Lord. The apostle declared "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11), and as Matthew Henry said, that lesson was learned "not at the feet of Gamaliel, but of Christ." Nor was it something he acquired there all in a moment. By nature we are restless, impatient, envious of the condition of others: but submission to the Divine will and confidence in God's goodness produces peace of mind and rest of heart. It is the mature Christian who can say "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:7).

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