

Spiritual Growth 2. Its Root

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

Spiritual Growth

2. Its Root

Before attempting to define and describe what the spiritual growth of a Christian consists of, we should first show what it is that is capable of growth, for spiritual growth necessarily supposes the presence of spiritual life: only a regenerated person can grow. Progress in the Christian life is impossible unless I be a Christian. We must therefore begin by explaining what a Christian is. To many of our readers this may appear to be quite superfluous, but in such a day as this, wherein spiritual counterfeits and delusions abound on every side, when so many are deceived on the all-important matter, and because of such widely-different classes, we deem it necessary to follow this course. We dare not take for granted that all our readers are Christians in the Scriptural sense of that term, and may it please the Lord to use what we are about to write to give light to some who are yet in darkness. Moreover, it may be the means of enabling some real Christians, now confused, to see the way of the Lord more clearly. Nor will it be altogether profitless, we hope, even to those more fully established in the faith. Three Kinds of "Christians" Broadly speaking there are three kinds of "Christians": preacher-made, self-made, and God-made ones. In the former are included not only those who were "sprinkled" in infancy and thereby made members of a "church" (though not admitted to all its privileges), but those who have reached the age of accountability and are induced by some high-pressure "evangelist" to "make a profession." This high pressure business is in different forms and in varying degrees, from appeals to the emotions to mass hypnotism whereby crowds are induced to "come forward." Under it countless thousands whose consciences were never searched and who had no sense of their lost condition before God were persuaded to "do the manly thing," "enlist under the banner of Christ," "unite with God's people in their crusade against the devil." Such converts are like mushrooms: they spring up in a night and survive but a short time, having no root. Similar too are the vast majority produced under what is called "personal work," which consists of a species of individual "buttonholing," and is conducted along the lines used by commercial travelers seeking to make a "forced sale." The "self-made" class is made up of those who have been warned against what has just been described above, and fearful of being deluded by such religious hucksters they determined to "settle the matter" directly with God in the privacy of their own room or some secluded spot. They had been given to understand that God loves everybody, that Christ died for the whole human race, and that nothing is required of them but faith in the gospel. By saving faith they suppose that a mere intellectual assent to, or acceptance of, such statements as are found in John 3:16 and Romans 10:13 is all that is intended. It matters not that John 2:23, 24 declares that "many believed in his name but Jesus

did not commit himself unto them," that "many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him lest they be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," which shows how much their "believing" was worth. Imagining that the natural man is capable of "receiving Christ as personal Saviour" they make the attempt, doubt not their success, go on their way rejoicing, and none can shake their assurance that they are now real Christians! "No man can come unto me except the Father which has sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Here is a declaration of Christ which has not received even mental assent by the vast majority in Christendom. It is far too flesh-abasing to meet with acceptance from those who wish to think that the settling of a man's eternal destiny lies entirely within his own power. That fallen man is wholly at the disposal of God is thoroughly unpalatable to an unhumiliated heart. To come to Christ is a spiritual act and not a natural one, and since the unregenerate are dead in sins they are quite incapable of any spiritual exercises. Coming to Christ is the effect of the soul's being made to feel its desperate need of Him, of the understanding's being enlightened to perceive His suitability for a lost sinner, of the affections being drawn out so as to desire Him. But how can one whose natural mind is "enmity against God" have any desire for His Son? God-made Christians are a miracle of grace, the products of Divine workmanship (Eph. 2:10). They are a Divine creation, brought into existence by supernatural operations. By the new birth we are capacitated for communion with the Triune Jehovah, for it is the spring of new sensibilities and activities. It is not our old nature made better and excited into spiritual acts, but instead, something is communicated which was not there before. That "something" partakes of the same nature as its Begetter: "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6), and as He is holy so that which He produces is holy. It is the God of all grace who brings us "from death unto life," and therefore it is a principle of grace which He imparts to the soul, and it disposes unto fruits which are well pleasing unto Him. Regeneration is not a protracted process, but an instantaneous thing, to which nothing can be added nor from it anything taken away (Eccl. 3:14). It is the product of a Divine fiat: God speaks and it is done, and the subject of it becomes immediately a new creature." Regeneration is not the outcome of any clerical magic nor does the individual experiencing it supply ought thereto: he is the passive and unconscious recipient of it. Said Truth incarnate: "which were born not of blood [heredity makes no contribution thereto, for God has regenerated heathens whose ancestors have for centuries been gross idolators] nor of the will of the flesh [for prior to this Divine quickening the will of that person was inveterately opposed to God] nor of the will of [a] man [the preacher was incapable of regenerating himself, much less others] but of God" (John 1:13)—by His sovereign and almighty power. And again Christ declared, "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof [its effects are quite manifest] but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth [its causation and operation are entirely above human ken, a mystery no finite intelligence can solve] so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8)—not in certain exceptional cases, but in all who experience the same. Such Divine declarations are as far removed from most of the religious teaching of the day as light is from darkness. The word "Christian" means "an anointed one," as the Lord Jesus is "The Anointed" or "The Christ." That was one of the titles accorded Him in the Old Testament: "The kings of the earth have set themselves and the rulers have taken counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed" or "Christ" (Ps. 2:2 and cf. Acts 2:26, 27). He is thus designated because "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38), for induction into His office and endowment for the discharge thereof. That office has three branches, for He was to act as Prophet, Priest and King. And in the Old Testament we find this foreshadowed in the anointing of Israel's prophets (1 Kings 19:16), their priests (Lev. 8:30) and their kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Sam. 2:4). Accordingly it was upon entrance into His public ministry the Lord Jesus was anointed," for at His baptism "the heavens were opened unto him" and there was seen "the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him," and the Father's voice was heard saying "This is my

beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16, 17). The Spirit of God had come upon others before that, but never as He now came upon the incarnate Son, "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34), for being the Holy One there was nothing whatever in Him to oppose the Spirit or grieve Him, but everything to the contrary. But it was not for Himself alone that Christ received the Spirit, but to share with and communicate unto His people. Hence in another of the Old Testament types we read that "The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron's beard, that ran down to the skirts of his garments" (Ps. 132:2). Though all Israel's priests were anointed, none but the high priest was done so upon the head (Lev. 8:12). This foreshadowed the Saviour being anointed not only as our great High Priest but also as the Head of His church, and the running down of the sacred unguent to the skirts prefigured the communicating of the Spirit to all the members, even the lowliest, of His mystical Body. "Now he who . . . hath anointed us is God, who hath sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22). "Of his [Christ's] fulness have we all received" (John 1:16). When the apostles were "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" on the day of Pentecost, and some mocked, Peter declared "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" and concluded by affirming that Jesus had been by the right hand of God exalted "and having received of the Father he that shed forth this" (Acts 2:33). A "Christian" then is an anointed one because he has received the Holy Spirit from Christ "the anointed." And hence it is written "But ye have an unction [or "anointing"] from the Holy One," that is, from Christ; and again, "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you" (1 John 2:20, 27), for just as we read of "the Spirit descending and remaining on him" (John 1:33) so He abides with us "forever" (John 14:16). This is the inseparable accompaniment of the new birth. The regenerated soul is not only made the recipient of a new life but the Holy Spirit is communicated to him, and by the Spirit he is then vitally united to Christ, for "be that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). The Spirit comes to indwell so that his body is made His temple. It is by this anointing or inhabitation the regenerate person is sanctified, or set apart unto God, consecrated to Him, and given a place in that "holy priesthood" which is qualified "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Thereby the saint is sharply distinguished from the world, for "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit is the identifying mark or seal: as it was by the Spirit's descent on Christ that John recognized Him (John 1:33) and "him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27), so believers are "sealed with that Holy Spirit." (Eph. 1:13) But since the individual concerned in regeneration is entirely passive and at the moment unconscious of what is taking place, the question arises, How is a soul to ascertain whether or not he has been Divinely quickened? At first sight it might appear that no satisfactory answer can be forthcoming, yet a little reflection should show that this must be far from being the case. Such a miracle of grace wrought in a person cannot long be imperceptible to him. If spiritual life be imparted to one dead in sins its presence must soon become manifest. This is indeed the case. The new birth becomes apparent by the effects it produces, namely, spiritual desires and spiritual exercises. As the natural infant clings instinctively to its mother, so the spiritual babe turns unto the One who gave it being. The authority of God is felt in the conscience, the holiness of God is perceived by the enlightened understanding, desires after Him stir within the soul. His wondrous grace is now faintly perceived by the renewed heart. There is a poignant consciousness of that which is opposed to the glory of God, a sense of our sinfulness such as was not experienced formerly. The natural man (all that he is as a fallen creature by the first birth) receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). By no efforts of his own, by no university education, by no course of religious instruction can he obtain any spiritual or vital knowledge of spiritual things. They are utterly beyond the range of his faculties. Self-love blinds him: self-pleasing chains him to the things of time and

sense. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. He may obtain a notional knowledge of them, but until a miracle of grace takes place in his soul he cannot have any spiritual acquaintance with them. Fishes could sooner live on dry ground or birds exist beneath the waves than an unregenerate person enter into a vital and experimental acquaintance with the things of God. The first effect of the spiritual life in the soul is that its recipient is convicted of his impurity and guilt. The conscience is quickened and there is a piercing realization of both personal pollution and criminality. The illumined mind sees something of the awful malignity of sin, as being in its very nature contrary to the holiness of God, and in its essence nothing but high-handed rebellion against Him. From that arises an abhorrence of it as a most vile and loathsome thing. The demerit of sin is seen, so that the soul is made to feel it has grievously provoked the Most High, exposing him to Divine wrath. Made aware of the plague of his heart, knowing himself to be justly liable to the awful vengeance of the Almighty, his mouth is stopped, he has not a word to say in self-extenuation, he confesses himself to be guilty before Him; and henceforth that which most deeply concerns him is, What must I do to be saved? in what way may I escape the doom of the Law? The second effect of the spiritual life in the soul is that its recipient becomes aware of the suitability of Christ to such a vile wretch as he now discovers himself to be. The glorious gospel now has an entirely new meaning for him. He requires no urging to listen to its message: it is heavenly music in his ears, "good news from a far country (Prov. 25:25). Nay, he now searches the Scriptures for himself to make sure that such a gospel is not too good to be true. As he reads therein of who the Saviour is and what He did, of the Divine incarnation and His death on the cross, he is awed as never before. As he learns that it was for sinners, for the ungodly, for enemies that Christ shed His blood, hope is awakened in his heart and he is kept from being overwhelmed by his burden of guilt and from sinking into abject despair. Desires of an interest in Christ spring up within his soul, and he is resolved to look for salvation in none other. He is convinced that pardon and security are to be found in Christ alone if so be that He will show him favor. He searches now to discover what Christ's requirements are. A Christian is not only one "anointed" by the Spirit, but he is also one who is a disciple of Christ (see Matthew 28:19 margin, and Acts 11:26), that is, a learner and follower of Christ. His terms of discipleship are made known in Luke 14:26-33. Those terms a regenerate soul is enabled to comply with. Convicted of his lost condition, having learned that Christ is the appointed and self-sufficient Saviour for sinners, he now throws down the weapons of his rebellion, repudiates his idols, relinquishes his love of and friendship with the world, surrenders himself to the Lordship of Christ, takes His yoke upon him, and thereby finds rest unto his soul; trusting in the efficacy of His atoning blood the burden of guilt is removed, and henceforth his dominant desire and endeavor is to please and glorify his Saviour. Thus regeneration issues in and evidences itself by conversion, and genuine conversion makes one a disciple of Christ, following the example He has left us.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/spiritual-growth-2-its-root/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net