

Growth Through the Truth

by John Nelson Darby

The healthful position of the saint is ever that of the new-born babe, constantly receiving nourishment from the word of God, and learning what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1

Topics: "Grace Of God", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the necessity of approaching God's truth with the humility of a 'new-born babe' to facilitate spiritual growth. He explains that true growth comes not from intellectual study alone but from the Holy Spirit's teaching, which requires believers to lay aside malice and guile. Darby illustrates that understanding God's grace is essential for growth, as it humbles us and allows us to receive nourishment from His Word. He encourages believers to continually seek the 'sincere milk of the word' and to recognize that God's grace is foundational to their relationship with Him. Ultimately, he calls for a deep reliance on Christ, who embodies grace and truth, to foster spiritual maturity.

Transcript

GROWTH THROUGH THE TRUTH

I PETER 2: 1-6

In one sense, as here taught us by the Spirit of God through the apostle, the healthful position of the saint is ever that of the " new-born babe " ; whilst in another sense we are, of course, to be making progress so as to become young men and fathers in Christ. As to practical position of soul in receiving truth from God, it is that of the new-born babe: " as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." This is the place in which, as believers, we are set by the Spirit, in order that we may grow up into Christ.

But if we are to grow by the sincere milk of the word, it is not by the exercise of our minds upon the word, nor yet even by great study of it merely ; we need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and in order to this, there must be the exercising of ourselves unto godliness-the " laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," so that the Holy Spirit be not grieved. Has the Christian envy, guile, hypocrisies, allowed to work in his heart ? There can be no growth in the true knowledge of the things of God. Therefore he is called upon to be ever a " new-born babe," coming to receive, in the

consciousness of his own weakness, littleness, and ignorance, and in simplicity of heart, food from the word of God.

The Lord always keeps His simple dependent ones thus. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." But then the knowledge of God always humbles ; the more we know of Him, the more shall we know of our own emptiness. " If any man think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Just as the babe is constantly receiving nourishment from the mother, so need we to be constantly receiving spiritual nourishment from the word of God. When the word is received by us in faith, we become strengthened ; we grow thereby in the knowledge of God, and of His grace. The apostle Paul, having heard of the faith of the Ephesians in the Lord Jesus, prays " that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," would " give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," etc. Having " tasted that the Lord is gracious," we come to His word and receive from Him that which we need to comfort, nourish, and refresh our souls. The word always comes with savour from Himself ; it is known as " the word of his grace." I may study the word again and again ; but unless I get into communion with Him by it, it will profit me nothing-at least at the time.

God reveals not His things " to the wise and prudent," but unto " babes." It is not the strength of man's mind judging about " the things of God," that gets the blessing from Him ; it is the spirit of the babe desiring " the sincere milk of the word." He says, " open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The strongest mind must come to the word of God as the new-born babe.

And so too in speaking of God's truth; whenever we cannot speak as the oracles of God," through the power of communion, it is our business to be silent. We should be cautious not to trifle with unascertained truth. Nothing hinders growth more than this-trifling with unascertained truth : we then act as masters and not as learners. Our position as regards the truth of God must be ever that of new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby.

But there is nothing so hard for our hearts as to be humble, nothing so easy for them as to get out of this place of lowliness. It is not by precepts merely that we are either brought into this state, or preserved there ; it is by tasting " that the Lord is gracious." It is quite true that God is a God of judgment, that He will exercise vengeance on His enemies ; but this is not the way in which He stands towards the Christian. He is made known unto us as "the God of all grace"; and the position in which we are set is that of tasting that He is gracious.

How hard it is for us to believe this, that the Lord is gracious! The natural feeling of our hearts is, " I know that thou art an austere man." Are our wills thwarted ? we quarrel with God's ways, and are angry because we cannot have our own. It may be perhaps that this feeling is not manifested; but still at any rate there is the want in all of us naturally of the understanding of the grace of God, the inability to apprehend it. See the case of the poor prodigal in the gospel : the thought of his father's grace never once entered into his mind when he set out on his return, and therefore he only reckoned on being received as a " hired servant." But what does the father say ? What are the feelings of his heart ? " Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it . . . for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." This is grace, free grace.

So too in the case of the woman of Samaria (the poor adulteress, ignorant of the character of Him who spake with her, " the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," and therefore the suited one to meet her need) : the Lord says to her, " If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Hadst thou only understood what grace is, thou wouldst have asked, and I would have given!

It is not only when there is open rebellion against God, and utter carelessness and unconcern about salvation, that there is this darkness of understanding as to grace. Our natural heart has got so far away from God, that it will look to anything in the world-to the devil even-to get happiness ; any ere but to the grace of God. Our consciences, when at all awakened to a sense of sin, and of its hatefulness in the sight of God, think that He cannot be gracious. Adam, had he known the grace of God, when he found himself naked, would at once have gone to God to cover him. But no, he was ignorant of it ; he saw his state, and he sought to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden. And so it is with us. The consciousness of being naked before God, apart from the understanding of His grace, makes us flee from Him.

Nay, further, as believers in Jesus, when our consciences come to be exercised, and we feel that we must have to do with God in everything, we may not have the distinct sense of the Lord's being gracious ; and there will then be not only a deep sense of our responsibility but at the same time the thought that we have to answer to God's requirements, and shall be judged of Him according to the way in which we do so. There is a measure of truth in this : the requirements of God must be met ; but then the wrongness is in thinking that, if we do not find in ourselves what will please God, He will condemn us because of it.

On the other hand there is sometimes the thought that grace implies God's passing by sin. But no, quite the contrary; grace supposes sin to be so horribly bad a thing that God cannot tolerate it. Were it in the power of man, after being unrighteous and evil, to patch up his ways, and mend himself so as to stand before God, there would then be no need of grace. The very fact of the Lord's being gracious shews sin to be so evil a thing, that, man being a sinner, his state is utterly ruined and hopeless, and nothing but free grace will do for him-can meet his need.

A man may see sin to be a deadly thing, and he may see that nothing that defiles can enter into the presence of God : his conscience may be brought to a true conviction of sin; yet this is not tasting " that the Lord is gracious." It is a very good thing to be brought even to that, for I am then tasting that the Lord is righteous, and it is needful for me to know it ; but then I must not stop there : sin without grace would put me in a hopeless state. Peter had not " tasted that the Lord was gracious " when he said, " Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! " and therefore he thought that his sin unfitted him for the presence of the Lord.

Such too was the thought of Simon the leper, respecting the poor woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Ali, if this man had been a prophet (if he had known the mind of God), he would have sent away this woman out of his presence, " for she is a sinner." And why ? Because he did not know that the Lord was gracious. He had a certain sense of the righteousness of God, but not the knowledge of His grace. I cannot say that God ought to be gracious ; but I can say (if ignorant of His grace), that He ought to cast me, as a sinner, away from His presence, because He is righteous. Thus we see that we must learn what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be, and that is " the God of all grace."

The moment I understand. (as Peter did) that I am a sinful man, and yet that it was because the Lord knew the full extent of my sin, and what its hatefulness was, that He came to me, I understand what grace is. Faith makes me see that God is greater than my sin, and not that my sin is greater than God. " God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." As soon as I believe Jesus to be the Son of God, I see that God has come to me because I was a sinner and could not go to Him.

Man's ability to meet the requirements of the holiness of God has been fully tried: but the plainer the light came, the more did it shew to man his darkness , and the stricter the rule, the more did it bring out his self-will. And then it was, " when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly "- when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is grace. God, seeing the blood of His Son, is satisfied with it ; and if I am satisfied with it, this is what glorifies God.

But the Lord that I have known as laying down His life for me is the same Lord that I have to do with every day of my life ; and all His dealings with me are on this same principle of grace. Do I want to learn what His love is ? it is taught in the cross ; but He gave Himself for me in order that all the fulness and joy that is in Him might be mine. I must be a learner of it still - a new born babe desiring " the sincere milk of the word that I may grow thereby."

The great secret of growth is the looking up to the Lord as gracious. How precious, how strengthening it is, to know that Jesus is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love towards me as when He died upon the cross for me! This is a truth that should be used by us in the most common everyday circumstances of life. Suppose, for instance, I find an evil temper in myself, which I feel it difficult to overcome: let me bring it to Jesus as my friend, virtue goes out of Him for my need. Faith should be ever thus in exercise against temptation, and not simply my own effort; my own effort against it will never be sufficient. The source of real strength is in the sense of the Lord's being gracious.

But the natural man in us always disallows Christ as the only source of strength and of every blessing. Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ : but He is gracious. And, knowing this, the way is to return to Him at once, just as we are, and then humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in Him, and from Him, that we shall find that which will restore our souls. Humbleness in His presence is the only real humbleness. If we own ourselves in His presence to be just what we are, we shall find that He will shew us nothing but grace.

But though " disallowed indeed of men "-of the natural heart in every one of us-who is this that says, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded"? It is God; He laid this corner stone, not man; and He says, This is what I think of Christ. By learning of God, through His teaching me by the Holy Spirit, I come to have the same thoughts about Jesus that He has. Here I find my strength, my comfort, my joy. That in which God delights and will delight for ever is now my joy also.

God says, " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased " ; " mine elect in whom my soul delighteth " ; and, working these (His) thoughts into my soul, I too see Jesus to be precious, and find my delight in Him. Thus He who was crucified for me-who " bare my sins in his own body on the tree "-is precious to God and precious to me. God could find no rest save in Jesus. We may look throughout the world, we shall find nothing which can satisfy our hearts but Jesus. If God looked for truth, for righteousness, all He could desire He found in Jesus ; and He found it in Him for us. Here is that which gives comfort to the soul.

I see Jesus " now in the presence of God for us"; and God is satisfied., God delights in Him.

It is Christ Himself in whom God rests, and will rest forever, but then Jesus, having borne and blotted out my sins by His own blood, has united me to Himself in heaven. He descended from above, bringing God down to us here: He has ascended, placing the saints in union with Himself there. If God finds Jesus precious, He finds me (in Him) precious also.

Jesus, as Man, has glorified God on the earth: God rests in that; as Man, having accomplished redemption' He " has passed into the heavens," " now to appear in the presence of God for us." It is Jesus who gives abiding rest to our souls., and not what our thoughts about ourselves may be. Faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as its ground of rest; it receives, loves, and apprehends what God has revealed, and what are God's thoughts about Jesus, in whom is His rest.

It is not by human knowledge or intellect that we attain to this. The poor ignorant sinner, when enlightened by the Spirit, can understand how precious Jesus is to the heart of God, as well as the most intellectual. The dying robber could give a better account of the whole life of Jesus than all around him, saying, " This man has done nothing amiss he was taught by the Spirit.

Are we much in communion with God, our faces will shine, and others will discover it though we may not be conscious of it ourselves. Moses, when he had been talking with God, wist not that the skin of his face shone ; he forgot himself, he was absorbed in God. As knowing Jesus to be precious to our souls, our eyes and our hearts being occupied with Him, they will be effectually prevented from being taken up with the vanity and sin around; and this too will be our strength against the sin and corruption of our own hearts. Whatever I see in myself that is not in Him is sin; but then it is not thinking upon my own sins, and my own vileness, and being occupied with them, that will humble me; but thinking of the Lord Jesus, dwelling upon the excellence in Him. It is well to have done with ourselves and to be taken up with Jesus. We arc entitled to forget ourselves, we are entitled to forget our sins, we are entitled to forget all but Jesus. It is by looking to Jesus that we can give up anything, that we can walk as obedient children: His love constrains us. Were it simply a command, we should have no power to obey.

The Lord give us thus to be learners of the fulness of grace which is in Jesus, the beloved and elect One of God, so that cc we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

May we, beloved, in searching into the truth of God, having tasted that the Lord is gracious," ever be found as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby.

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