

Are We Still Growing As Christians?

Whatever in creation is not growing is dying or already dead!

2 Peter 3:18 [Amplified Bible] *“But grow in grace [undeserved favour, and spiritual strength] and recognition and knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Messiah, [anointed one].”*

Hebrews 6:4-5 [NIV] *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,”*

This warning is **not** to spiritually young Christians, but to people who have had five spiritual experiences over what may have been many years since their initial conversion.

a) Been enlightened

Hebrews 10:32-35 [NIV] *“Remember those earlier days **after you had received the light**, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”*

It is a true saying that in many ways it is easier to stand firm in adversity than it is to remain faithful in prosperity. A life of ease has ruined more people than trouble ever did.

All of us can remember the ridicule and hostility that we experienced from our friends and relatives when we first became a Christian.

We may have had to give up our job because of our new outlook on life. **We must never lose that initial enthusiasm and dedication we then had for God’s way of life, and our receiving enlightenment into the real purpose of life.**

b) Tasted the heavenly gift

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Having accepted the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ as atonement for our sins we have received the gift of eternal life.

Romans 6:4-5 [NIV] *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life**. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”*

Just as the man Jesus Christ rose from the dead and now lives eternally as our High Priest at God’s heavenly throne so we have joined Him in eternal life.

Romans 4:18-25 [NIV] *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of*

*God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was **credited to him as righteousness.**' The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*

Our faith in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is credited to us as righteousness, an undeserved gift from God of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

From the moment we accept this gift our standing in God's sight does not change, when God looks at us He sees only the righteousness of His Son.

What does fluctuate in our lives is our spiritual state of maturity; this can change on a day-to-day basis according to the closeness of our walk with God and whether we have grieved the Holy Spirit. Hopefully, if we are not falling away, the peaks of our spiritual maturity will be ever increasing.

c) Become partakers of Holy Spirit

Acts 2:38 [NIV] *"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit.**'"*

Upon repentance and baptism, the outward sign of accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, we receive the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Acts 5:32 [NIV] *"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

The gift of Holy Spirit comes with unconditional obedience; He will only come into our lives as Director of our lives, for He is Sovereign Lord.

John 14:15-17 [NIV] *"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."*

This scripture indicates that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is at two levels, "with us" or "in us." **I understand that it is dependent on our relationship with the Holy Spirit as to what level He works with us!**

[For additional understanding of the presence of the Holy Spirit see our articles 'The Working Of The Holy Spirit In Us' and 'Are We Resisting The Work Of The Holy Spirit In Us?' both under main heading 'Holy Spirit.']

d) Tasted the goodness of the Word of God

1 Thessalonians 2:13 [NIV] *"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."*

The emphasis is that what the church received was the Word of God, not the puny logic of man.

The trouble of many in the church is so often they cling to a man-made religion instead of a God-given faith.

The indication is that in the Thessalonian church an active faith was being shown in the changed lives of those who had heard and accepted the Word of God.

Head knowledge of God's Word and His Nature is of no use until it became what is in our heart.

The physical heart is what drives our lives; if our heart stops life ends on a physical level.

On the spiritual level, if the heart, the driving force of our life, as well as the head are not involved then we are spiritually dead.

It has been said that the longest journey a Christian has to take is from the head to the heart, from understanding the truth of scripture in our mind to the place where that knowledge becomes the driving force of our life.

When this happens we truly will have tasted the goodness of God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12-13 [NIV] *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

It is by using the Word of God that we can distinguish what parts of life, our thoughts and attitudes, are driven by our bodily passions, our intellectual mind or by the union of our spirit and the Holy Spirit.

We can, with God's Word, bring under judgement our thoughts and ideas to see if they originated from our built-in human passions [body], or from our own mind or will [human spirit] or from the Will of God in our lives, [spirit/Spirit union].

e) Tasted the powers of the age to come

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 [Living Bible] *“It is God who has made you and me into faithful Christians and commissioned us apostles to preach the Good News. He has put His brand upon us, His mark of ownership, and given us His Holy Spirit in our hearts as guarantee that we belong to Him, and as the first instalment of all that He is going to give us.”*

Ephesians 1:13-14 [Amplified Bible] *“In Him you also who heard the Word of Truth, the glad tidings of your salvation, and have believed in and have adhered to and relied on Him, were stamped with the seal of the long promised Holy Spirit. That Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance, the first fruit, the pledge of foretaste, the down-payment on our heritage, in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring complete possession of it, to the praise of His Glory.*

As we experience the Work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we are tasting the power of the age to come.

Philippians 3:10-11 [NIV] *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Paul was desiring “resurrection power” now.

Resurrection power is experiencing the presence of the resurrected Christ as real as the disciples did who walked with Him on earth.

We will not see Jesus on a natural level but we can experience His presence on a supernatural level.

[For more details on this subject see our article ‘The Power Of The Resurrection Can Be Ours Now’ listed under main heading ‘Resurrection’.]

Hebrews 6:4-6 [NIV] *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”*

If we have had all these experiences, and all Christians have in different measure, and we then deliberately turn away from Christ, we lose our ability to repent. Our conduct is equivalent to crucifying Christ once more.

Hebrews 6:7-8 [NIV] *“Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.”*

This analogy of the soil which receives the free gift of God’s rain and is cultivated by Him yet does not produce useful fruit but thorns and thistles is enlarged in parables given by Jesus Christ.

Matthew 13:3-9 [NIV] *“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.’”*

We see in this parable three ways in which we can reject what God has sown and nourished in our lives.

a) To shut our mind to what we are hearing

We, as a result of pride, have an unteachable mind, our vain mind considers we don’t need new truth. Or what we hear may condemn the things we enjoy doing, so we refuse to listen.

b) We fail to think things through

We have a shallow mind that is governed by every new craze or fashion which we take up and just as quickly drop.

We then treat God’s truth in the same way, we react emotionally but without conviction.

Christianity has its demands that have to be faced and accepted. **Christianity offers not only great privileges but also responsibilities.** Sudden emotional enthusiasm can soon become a dying fire.

c) We have a life too full to give needed space for God’s Word to mature and be fruitful

Modern lifestyle can be constantly in the “*fast lane*” increasingly crowded with the pre-occupation of our physical needs and desires. **We become too busy to have the daily “quiet time” with our Creator in prayer and study so that our spiritual life may mature.**

We may not deliberately neglect prayer and study but we become so involved with work, committees, charitable service and good works that each day that we are too tired to think of anything else.

How then can we avoid falling away?

Hebrews 6:9-12 [Living Bible] *“Dear friends, even though I am talking like this I really don’t believe that what I am saying applies to you. I am confident you are producing the good fruit that comes along with your salvation. For God is not unfair. How can He ever forget your hard work for*

Him, or forget the way you used to show your love for Him, and still do, by helping His children? And we are anxious that you keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, so that you will get your full reward. Then knowing what lies ahead for you, you won't become bored with being a Christian, nor becoming spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience."

We can never earn salvation, it is a gift from God, but our future reward will depend on how we use what God has blessed us with, to love and serve others.

Ephesians 2:8 [Living Bible] *"Because of His kindness you have been saved through trusting in Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is **not** a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it. It is God Himself who has made us what we are and has given us new lives from Jesus Christ; and long ages ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others."*

The Christian mind, **the Christian attitude to life is that of a servant**, and it is because of that attitude to life we will never, ever fall away.

The faithful servant doesn't look for reward to motivate their life, they are grateful to have the privilege of being a servant to so loving a Master.

The faithful servant is always there at His Master's side ready to go or do whatever is His Master's desire.

The bond slave, the true rendering of the Greek word that the apostles applied to themselves in their relationship with Christ, is a servant for life with no personal rights, only responsibilities.

Galatians 6:17 [Living Bible] *"From now on please don't argue with me about these things, for I carry on my body the scars of the whipping and wounds from Jesus' enemies that mark me as His slave."*

Nothing was going to stop Paul continuing to be a slave of Christ who served his Master by serving his fellow Christians and being willing to lay down his life for them.

Galatians 6:14-15 [Living Bible] *"As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross my interest in all the attractive things of the world was killed long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead ... what counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people."*

Paul's total commitment was now towards being a faithful servant of Christ, willingly he had lost interest in the status symbols of the society around him, and the friends of his previous lifestyle had long left him. **What was important to him now was helping his Master, Jesus Christ, bring about the conversion of others.**

We need to ask the question, "Is our commitment in life to be a faithful servant of Christ?"