

Last week I began a short topical study entitled Pressing Questions—the first and most important question was, Are You a True Christian?—this morning's question is of second importance, Are You a Growing Christian—are you growing and maturing in the things of God...

This is a question often neglected as if the first question is all that matters—yes, it's the most important question, but it's not the only question—next to the question whether or not we are true Christians, is the question, are we growing Christians...

There are many reasons we ought to be concerned with our spiritual growth—[1] it's closely connected to our own comfort and assurance, [2] it's intimately related to our usefulness to others, and [2] it's necessarily connected to the amount of glory and honor we give Christ in and through our lives—spiritual growth is important...

I. The Need for Growth

II. The Nature of Growth

I. The Need for Growth

1. Verses 17 and 18 are obviously connected—in v17 we have a warning (beware) and in v18 we have an exhortation (grow)...
2. It's the warning in v17, that constitutes the reason or need for growth—fundamentally, there are two reasons...
3. [1] The danger of falling from steadfastness, v17—"You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness..."
4. When Peter says—"since you know this beforehand"—he's obviously referring back to the previous verse...
5. V16—"as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of Scripture..."
6. Peter confesses that some of the things Paul wrote was difficult to understand, and was being twisted by false teachers...
7. In light of that he warns—"beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness"—that is—fall like the false teachers...
8. The word "steadfastness" refers to—"an unwavering commitment to Christ and truth"—"to be firmly set on Him..."
9. [2] The danger of being led away with error—this is how people fall from their steadfastness—they are led away by error...
10. That is—the error of the false teachers—this error can concern either a central doctrine or a practice of life...
11. False teachers promote one of two kinds of error—the first has to do with key doctrines—the person and work of Christ...
12. But other false teachers promote deviant lifestyles, for example, today many teach sodomy as a lawful lifestyle...
13. But either way, if their error concerns key doctrines or deviant lifestyles, they lead people away from the truth...
14. Now—I am not suggesting 2Pet.3:17 provides all the reasons why Christians should grow—their are many reasons...
15. But—I am suggesting that it provides one important reason, which is, otherwise we are prime targets for false teaching...
16. Because notice—the remedy is provided in v18—"but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."
17. But—before I come to v18, let me briefly underscore a single applications from v17—Growth is necessary not optional (notice two reasons)...

18. [a] False teachers are real—I think many of us are kind of insulated from what's going on around us theologically...
19. Some people are teaching that we are not saved by faith, but by our faithfulness to our covenant commitment...
20. Some people are teaching that love wins, that is, in the end nobody goes to hell, but every person goes to heaven...
21. Some people are teaching that you can be a Christian and yet live in open sin, for example homosexual sin...
22. My friends, we would be foolish to think, that for some reason we're exempt from the voice of the father of lies...
23. [b] Apostasy is real—that is—there are professing Christians everyday, who fall from their own steadfastness...
24. Now—let me clarify—we all know that Scripture teaches very clearly, that every true Christian will endure...
25. That is a blessed and wonderful truth—ultimately speaking, God will never let us roam too far from the truth...
26. But—one way in which God's people are preserved is—He brings these warnings with power to their hearts...
27. Thus—Peter is here speaking to church members, to professing Christians, and he warns them of apostasy...
28. While on the one hand, we need to take comfort in God's promise to keep us, we must also take these warnings seriously...
29. Very likely—the professing Christian who fails to give these warnings due weight, is most prone to fall away...
30. Matthew Poole—"This admonition he gives them, not to discourage them with fear of apostasy, but to awaken them to that holy care which would be a means to prevent it; not to weaken their faith, and reliance on the promise, but so to keep them from security, and trust in themselves..."
31. Now—let me make this very plain—apostasy never happens overnight—it happens slowly and gradually over time...
32. This is seen in the word Peter uses translated "being led away"—it literally means—"to gradually carry away by erosion..."
33. Apostasy always begins gradually—they begin to deny certain things, and cease doing certain things, essential to the Christian life...
34. And before you know it—this has snowballed into denying major truths and/or justifying outright sin and wickedness...
35. My dear friends—the remedy of such falling away is growth—growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...

II. The Nature of Growth

A. Growth in grace

1. Before I look at these two separately, I want to briefly point out that both are intimately connected to Christ...
2. V18—"but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"—it's the grace and knowledge of Christ...
3. Thus—whatever is meant by "grace" and "knowledge"—they are both necessarily connected to Jesus Christ...
4. Now—grace is one of those words that isn't that easy to define—the reason being, it has various distinctions...
5. When Scripture tells us to "grow in grace" it means we increase, amplify, or enlarge the grace of God in our hearts...
6. I suggest—fundamentally by grace is meant—spiritual strength that enables us to pursue Christ-like qualities...

7. 2Pet.1:5-7—"But also for this very reason giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love..."
8. These are all "grace" or the result of grace (spiritual and unmerited strength) in the soul—and they find their perfect expression in Christ...
9. Remember, because Christ had the Holy Spirit without measure, He had grace without measure—He's the epitome of grace...
10. Thus—to grow in grace is the same thing as growing in Christ-likeness, or true Christian purity and holiness...
11. Now—mind you, it's not my intent or purpose, to address the question—HOW are Christians to grow in grace...
12. Let me simply remind you—this grace is—"the grace of the Lord Jesus"—it's FROM Him and its IN Him...
13. The only way Christians can grow in grace—is by abiding in Christ, who is the source of all sanctifying grace...
14. My dear friends, there is absolutely no true growth in grace, but by communion and fellowship with Christ...
15. But—my purpose this morning, is to assist you in asking the question—Am I growing in grace—Am I a growing Christian...
16. Thus—here I want to suggest three evidences of spiritual growth—three things are true of every growing Christian...
17. Now—before I come to these, I want to suggest there's a similarity between marks of physical and spiritual health...
18. In other words—those things true of a physically healthy person, are similarly true of a spiritually healthy person...
19. They are in overview—hunger, exercise, and strength—physically healthy people have hunger, exercise, and are strong...
20. So too—spiritually healthy people, growing Christians, have a spiritual hunger, use spiritual exercises, and have spiritual strength...
21. [1] Growing Christians have spiritual hunger—a growing and healthy Christians hungers for fellowship with God...
22. Donald Whitney—in his book entitled Ten Questions Diagnose Your Spiritual Health—"Do you hunger for God..."
23. Ps.63:1-2—"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary. to see Your power and Your glory..."
24. [2] Growing Christians use spiritual exercises—a healthy person is active—they engage in some form of exercise...
25. Well—what are the spiritual exercises that keep Christians healthy—but the public and private means of grace...
26. 1Pet.2:1-3—"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious..."
27. [3] Growing Christians have spiritual strength—a healthy person is strong—they have energy to work hard...
28. So too—those who are spiritually healthy have spiritual strength to serve God, resist temptation, and mortify sin...
29. 2Tim.2:1—"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"—a healthy soul is a strong soul...
30. Now—remember—a certain sign or evidence of spiritual strength, is the acknowledgement of spiritual weakness...
31. When I am weak, then I am strong—when I am weak in and of myself—when I abandon all self-trust I look to Christ...

B. Growth in knowledge

1. V18—"but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"—growth is in grace and knowledge...
2. Now—the first thing that needs mentioning is—these two are closely and necessarily connected—"growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord..."
3. In fact it seems, the latter (knowledge), is a primary means to grow in the former (grace)—to grow in grace is to grow in knowledge (rightly defined)...
4. 2Pet.1:2-3—"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue..."
5. Twice Peter describes grace "multiplied" or given "through"—"the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord..."
6. Thus—to grow in grace and knowledge is inseparable—you can not really grow in one without growing in the other...
7. Now—the second thing I need to point out is—the knowledge referred to is—"knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."
8. The prepositional phrase—"of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"—means it's knowledge in, from, and about Christ...
9. In other words—the knowledge that Christians are to grow in, has a direct and necessary relation to Christ Himself...
10. Thus—I want to suggest three marks of Christians who are growing in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...
11. [1] They know more about Christ—that is—they know more about the person and work of Christ as the primary focus of Scripture...
12. Dear brethren, I've said this many times, there is no real Christian growth, without growing in knowledge of Christ...
13. Heb.5:12-14—"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the firsts principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil..."
14. [2] They know more of Christ Himself—here I want to make a very important clarification about the nature of knowledge...
15. We have the tendency to reduce knowledge to mere intellectual knowing, but Scripture speaks of it more widely...
16. "To know" in Scripture always brings with it the idea of affection and intimacy—"to know" is to know relationally...
17. For example, our Savior will say to the foolish virgins in the day of judgment—"I never knew you"—that is, relationally and affectionately...
18. Our Savior is without knowledge of certain people—without a relational and affectionate knowledge of them...
19. He obviously knows everything about them—He will judge them—He will judge even the thoughts and motives of their hearts...
20. Dear brethren, surely Christ has perfect knowledge of every person in that sense, and yet doesn't know some in another sense...
21. Well—I trust it's obvious that true knowledge of Christ, is not merely knowledge about Christ but knowledge of Christ...
22. Let me illustrate—when I was first introduced to my wife, I spent the next several months learning ABOUT her...
23. Who she was, where she grew up, her family members, and of course, I learned much about her native country...
24. But since we have been married now for 17 years, my knowledge of her has increased—I increasingly know her...

25. Yes—I know more ABOUT her, but I also know more OF her—these two concepts necessarily go together...
26. Dear brethren, we must remember, Christ is a Person (exalted in heaven), who lives in our hearts by His Spirit...
27. We at times here that Christianity isn't a religion but relationship—which of course is in many ways ignorant...
28. I thin many people dislike the term "religion" because it carries with it ideas of rules, structure, and responsibility...
29. But—Christianity is a religion that has at its very core a relationship with God in Christ—these go together...
30. I know at this point, it's rather difficult to judge whether or not, you've grown closer and more intimate to Christ...
31. Thus—I want to take a few minutes and briefly examine several texts, that might shed light upon this point...
32. Jer.9:23-24—"Thus says the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment (justice), and righteousness in the earth. For in thee I delight, says the LORD..."
33. Here "understands" and "knows" are related but distinguished—to know God is know about Him and its knowing Him...
34. But notice—it's knowing God as the He is—as the LORD—who delights in—"lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness..."
35. Eph.3:18-19—"may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge..."
36. The apostle prayed that Christians would "comprehend" and "know" the love of Christ "which passes knowledge..."
37. That is—no mere man will ever exhaust it—not even in heaven for all eternity—it's without end—it's limitless...
38. Phil.3:10—"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..."
39. MH—"Labour to know him more clearly and more fully, to know more of Christ and to know him to better purpose, so as to be more like him and to love him better..."
40. [3] They know more of God as Father in Christ—knowledge of Christ and the Father are always connected...
41. Jn.17:3—"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent..."
42. Now—before I leave this question (whether or not we are growing Christians), I feel obligated to give a few directions..
43. It's very easy for us, as Christians, to become rather discouraged with our present growth (both in grace and knowledge)...
44. And I know this because I too often find myself not growing—it's easy for all of us, to become spiritually lazy and preoccupied...
45. [a] Repent—that is—confess your lack of growth, sinful indifference, backsliding, and spiritual laziness to God...
46. This can be illustrated in our Savior's 7 letters to His churches in Rev.2-3—over and again He tells them to repent...
47. [b] Resolve—that is—determine, by the grace of God, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...
48. My friends—it's not enough for us to conclude we are not growing Christians—but we must do something about it...
49. And—you know what—you can start doing something about it right now, by crying to God for grace to change...
50. [c] Run to Christ—by this I mean—remember brethren, we are not saved because of anything we have or will do...