

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you discuss the role of scripture in spiritual growth?

ANSWER: The Bible is clear in its teaching that the Christian walk is one that involves growth. From the time of our conversion until the time in which we leave this world in death, we are undergoing a transformation from spiritual infancy to that of maturity. For example, Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus refers to entering the Kingdom of God as a new birth. He states, *"...most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3, NKJV).

At our baptism our life in Christ begins. From there we are expected to press on to maturity. Peter exhorts us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Paul refers to this as our transformation. We are admonished to *"...not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).

The verb 'transformed' indicates ongoing action. Literally we could say that we are being transformed. This is just another way of describing the maturation process.

Another term that the Bible uses to describe the growth process is sanctification. The word 'sanctify' has its origin in the Greek word *hagios*, from which we get our word 'saint'. The term refers to being set apart or to be made holy. Saints are the sanctified ones or holy ones. In the scripture sanctification is described in two ways. First we have positional sanctification, and second we have progressive sanctification.

Positional sanctification occurs when one obeys the Gospel. We refer to this as positional because our position before God changes. Before becoming a Christian we are separated from God and are dead in trespasses and sin. When we learn of the truth and come to Christ we are forgiven of our sin and pass from death unto life. We are called out of the world and are translated into the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). We are redeemed, reconciled, and made whole by the

blood of Christ. The Hebrew writer in discussing the sacrifice that Jesus made for our salvation states, "*By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Heb. 10:10, NKJV).

Note that the word 'sanctified' is used in the past tense, indicating an event that has already occurred. Positional sanctification is not a process but rather an event that occurs in a moment in time. As one is buried with Christ in baptism he is raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5).

The Bible also refers to sanctification as a process that occurs over time. In this sense we are not talking about becoming a Christian but rather about growing in Christ-likeness. Again we refer to Hebrews. "*For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*" (Heb. 10:14, NKJV)

Here we find that the word 'sanctified' is used in an ongoing sense. The writer refers to those who *are being sanctified* indicating an ongoing process. Employed in this way it refers to our growth.

The relationship between the knowledge of God's Word and our growth is directly proportional. As we learn more of scripture and embrace it, the more we grow. Jesus clearly stated this relationship in John 17. In His prayer He asks the Father to sanctify His people. "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*" (John 17:17, NKJV)

In 1 John 2:12-14, John places believers into three groups. Employing figurative language that suggests growth, he refers to us as fathers, young men, and children.

Spiritual children are those who are in a state of spiritual immaturity. In this group are those who have learned of sin and the redemption that is ours in Christ. It would also include people who even though are Christians have failed to study and grow.

The second group in this passage is those designated as young men. They have grown strong and have learned how to overcome the wicked one. The passage shows the connection between their strength and the Word when it states that they are strong in the Word. The word 'overcome' comes from the Greek word *niacho* or *nike* that means a victor, a

conqueror, to prevail and to win. They have understood spiritual warfare and how to win the daily battles that all believers have with sin, Satan, and self.

The third group is referred to as fathers. Spiritually applied, these are those who have moved beyond just knowing doctrine but rather they have become enthralled with God. They do not just know about Him but have a deep rich relationship with Him.

As the above illustrates, knowledge is key in this growth process. Knowledge does three things. First we have cognition. This means that we have learned what scripture means. We find out what the Bible has to say and we take it in as it is the truth of God.

Cognition then gives rise to conviction. This is what we believe and are convicted of as truth. Truth begins to overcome our thoughts. Our worldview changes and we begin to bring our thoughts captive to the mind of Christ. Conviction is that which compels us to obedience.

The third thing that is involved is our affection. Cognition develops conviction in the conscience, and conviction leads to affection. The Bible is replete with references to those who loved the Word of God. David continually in the book of Psalms states how the Word was his love. He mentions on numerous occasions how he found it to be his delight.

One cannot grow in Christ-likeness unless one grows in knowledge. The foundation of sanctification is knowing the truth of God. This is why study of the Word is so important. Too many Christians are negligent in this area of discipleship. Let us all strive to learn the Word so that we will grow in the grace of our Lord.

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YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

Over the years we've seen several people stop attending services and leave the Church. We witness those who have been attending the Church services all their lives begin attending "denominational" services. They give various

excuses for their departure, but one of the most common ones is "I just didn't feel like I was getting anything out of it" or "I walk out feeling so much better at (insert "denomination" here)."

Often, we have the wrong idea of what the Church service does for us. Many parents bring their children to the service to learn the Bible when Ephesians 6:4 tells us it's the parents' responsibility to educate them at home. Also surprisingly common is the misconception that attending a service erases the bad we've done during the week. I've heard statements along the lines of "After what I did on Saturday night, I need go to Church on Sunday morning to make up for it." This isn't how we obtain forgiveness, yet this is what many expect the Church service to do. We shouldn't make our way to the services with the idea of coming in and soaking up Biblical knowledge and then getting a tally mark in the "good" column to balance the bad marks we tallied during the week. Too many of us expect that we can enter the service a gloomy sinner and emerge with a shining halo and glowing aura surrounding us just by simply attending.

Through all of this, we forget the center of the Church service. While we can gain much support from the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for the sick, and study the Bible, the main point is to worship God. On Sunday mornings, it is specifically to remember Jesus' death on the cross (1 Cor. 11:24-26, Acts 20:7). However, we're busy thinking about how we don't feel like we're learning enough, how boring the speaker is, or how we don't feel uplifted enough. We're too concerned about what the service is supposed to do for **us**. We sound like spoiled, selfish brats. When we carry this "me, me, me" attitude with us into the services, we begin to lose focus on truly worshipping God. Too many of us are more worried about being entertained than worshipping God, and we see this especially prevalent among "denominations." The Church is losing people who have grown up being taught what is doctrinally right and wrong to these "denominations." These people are willing to compromise those beliefs all so they can feel warm and fuzzy when exiting their entertaining yet scripturally unsound services.

Whether it is a job, a relationship, a marriage, or the Church, when one says they feel that they aren't getting anything out of it, you have to ask them, "How much are you

putting into it?" We want an hour-long service to transform us into a better person, but how much effort do we put into this during the week? You want to learn more from the Bible? Well, how much are you studying at home? You want your children to learn the Bible? How much are you teaching them during the week? You want to receive forgiveness? How much are you asking for it and giving it during the week? You want to be a better Christian? How much are you working on it outside of the service? Coming in, sitting down, and being a "Sunday Morning Christian" for an hour won't do these things for you.

Concerning those who never feel encouraged following a service, a congregation has to ask itself, "What are we doing/not doing to make people feel this way?" We are very somber during the service; many of us tend to have a stoic look upon our faces. We often go through the motions during our services, singing the same songs, practically reciting the same prayers. We sound depressed when we're singing songs that are supposed to be of praise. Most of us have been attending services all of our lives, so it's easy for us to simply go through the motions. In fact, several of us are probably there out of tradition more than anything else. We need to be careful to avoid this and instead think about the meaning behind what we are doing, including attending the service.

Afterwards, how do we treat each other? Many congregations tend to have their own inner cliques that quickly gather. How often do we try to truly reach out and talk to visitors or those at services to whom we don't normally talk? We know that God has given all of us talents. Some of us have been given the abilities we can use in the services such as teaching or singing, but there are also those of us who have been given the ability to reach out, encourage, and uplift others. We're concerned with gaining new Christians, but the truth is that we're having trouble holding onto the old ones.

Not only for those who have stopped attending services and left the Church, but also for all of us who have at some time thought we're not getting anything out of the service, how much are we putting into it? We probably spend more time thinking about what to wear or what to eat afterwards than we spend meditating on worshipping God. We don't have to wait until the Lord's Supper begins to start concentrating on it. Instead of waiting until the service

begins, why don't we think on these things at least the night before, if not days? We can't expect to get anything out of the Church service if we don't put in any effort outside of the service.

BEN

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
September 13 – 17	Estesburg Eubank, KY	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
September 20 – 24	Hopkinsville Hopkinsville, OH	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
September 23 – 26	Junction City Junction City, KY	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)
September 26 – 29	Van Lear Van Lear, KY	Various Speakers
Sept. 30 - Oct. 3	Livingston Livingston, TN	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Why did God put a mark on Cain?
2. Why did King Asa remove his mother from the position of queen mother?
3. In the book of Nehemiah after the project was completed, all the people gathered in front of the Water Gate to hear the reading of the Law. Who read it to them?
4. According to the Sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus say would be the reward for those who are pure in heart?
5. It had been reported to Paul that some of the Thessalonians had become what?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. When God first spoke to Samuel, what did His message concern? THE COMING JUDGEMENT ON THE HOUSE OF ELI (1 Sam. 3:10-14)
2. According to Solomon's writings in Proverbs, mercy and truth should be what? BOUND AROUND YOUR NECK AND WRITTEN ON THE TABLET OF YOUR HEART (Prov. 3:3)
3. God told Ezekiel that which three men delivered themselves by their righteousness? NOAH, DANIEL, AND JOB (Eze. 14:14)
4. What three animals were being sold in the temple when Jesus drove out the vendors? DOVES, SHEEP, AND OXEN(John 2:14)
5. In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul said that the gospel is the power of God to salvation to which two people? THE GREEKS AND THE JEWS(Rom. 1:16)