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“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15).

Grow in Grace

Central Truth: Every believer should advance toward spiritual ministry.

L251. Date: December 1989. **Text:** I John 2:12-17.

Topic: Growth: Spiritual; Grace: Growth In.

The Christian life begins with a birth, continues with growth, and culminates in the full image of Christ. The Bible is filled with invitations for sinners to come to the Savior and be born again. It has scores of texts which challenge believers to grow up in Christ. It makes repeated promises of our being like Christ, bearing the image of the heavenly Father as we have borne the image of our earthly fathers. The great emphasis of Scripture relating to the Christian life is that spiritual growth is both possible and imperative.

The Bible says, *“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (II Peter 3:18). It calls for us to *“grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ”* (Ephesians 4:15). Spiritual growth is a sign of spiritual life. It is one assurance of salvation.

Are you more mature as a Christian this year than you were last year, this month than last month, this week than last week? The Bible says we are growing or we are disobeying God. We will never exhaust our potential of knowing God more intimately and personally. The apostle Paul's consuming desire was that he might know Jesus Christ more intimately — perceiving, recognizing, and understanding Him more fully and clearly. (Read Philippians 3:8-11 in The Amplified Bible.) That must be our heart's desire, also.

I. DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH (I John 2:12-14)

A. We begin the spiritual life as *“little children”* (verses 12, 13). That

is because we were “*born of the Spirit*” at conversion (John 3:3-6). John calls the new converts “born ones” (Greek, *teknia*) and assures them that their “*sins are forgiven.*” When a person is born again, the guilt and penalty for his sins are removed. He receives a new nature because the Spirit of God begins living in his human spirit. He is a new creation in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17). He is a newborn babe in Christ.

But even as a spiritual infant, he can and must grow. The pure nourishment he receives from the “*milk of the word*” enables him to grow (I Peter 2:2). He ceases to be an infant and becomes a young child (Greek, *paidia*).

As a born one, the forgiveness of sin is the primary truth he understands. But as a child, his personal knowledge of the Father increases and becomes a great influence in his life. That is the progress noted in I John 2:12, 13. But that is not the limit of spiritual growth.

B. We grow in the spiritual life to become “*young men*” (verses 13, 14). As wonderful as it is for a born one to be assured of forgiveness and a young child to know the Father, there is a fourfold blessing for those who continue to grow.

(1) The wicked one is overcome as one continues to grow (verse 13). Reference is not to some one-time victory. The verb tense indicates that one has overcome and continues to enjoy victory. That victory begins with a resolve to be undefiled for God (Daniel 1:8). It continues as one puts on the armor of God to stand against the wicked one (Ephesians 6:13). One enjoys victory as he stands steadfastly in the power of the Lord (II Peter 3:17). Victory over the devil is the birthright of every child of God. He who does not have the victory indicates that he is not growing in Christ.

(2) The Word of God within enables the victory (verse 13). It is the sword of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual battle. But it is more. The Bible refers to itself as the traveler's map, the light in darkness, the foundation of our building, the food for our souls, and the very book of God himself. By it a young man cleanses his way, knows God better, and lives in joy. The growing Christian stays close to God and His Word.

(3) Inner strength explains the victory (verse 14). That strength is not of the flesh; it is of God. The Bible does not call us merely to be strong, but to be “*strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*” (Ephesians 6:10). So we are “*strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man*” (Ephesians 3:16). That power which is able to do “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*” is in you right now (Ephesians 3:20). Be strong in the Lord!

(4) Victory over the evil one is a present fact (verse 14). The devil is overthrown. He is conquered. Those who have faith in Jesus have already

gained the victory and must claim it by faith as they resist the devil. The Bible does not say, *"You may overcome the wicked one some day."* It says, *"Ye have overcome the wicked one."* That is a present fact. Believe it. Claim it by faith and live in victory. That is your birthright as a *"young man"* in the Lord.

C. The goal in spiritual growth is to become *"fathers"* (verses 13, 14). The meaning is spiritual, not physical. One who is unmarried or even a lady can become a *"father"* spiritually. The people addressed as *"fathers"* are mature believers, those who have advanced far in Christ.

One thing is said about the spiritual fathers, and it is so important that the statement is made twice: *"Ye have known him that is from the beginning."* For many years the *"fathers"* had known the Lord. He who remained without change from the beginning created a steadfastness in doctrine and practice to those who had long known Him. Here is a call to the older saints to be an example to the new believers.

II. ENEMY OF GROWTH (I John 2:15-17)

A. The world is the enemy (verse 15). By the term world the Bible does not refer to the material creation. (Earth is the common designation for that.) The world means the unregenerate human society, the course of the age which is under the control of the devil and his demonic hosts. That world does not know God and is the enemy of the people of God (John 15:19; 17:14). Satan is the god of this world, while the God of the Bible is the God of believers. Draw carefully that distinction.

B. Loving the world is the problem (verse 15). It is strange that Christians should have to be admonished not to love the enemy. But the command is given repeatedly, *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:2). If a Christian aligns with the things of the world, he commits spiritual adultery against God. Whoever is a friend of the world is not a friend of God (James 4:4). Be warned.

C. Lust of the world is the enticement (verse 16). Lust means a strong desire, a deep yearning. It can be either good or bad. In this text it is bad. Lust expresses itself in *"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,"* each being opposed to the Father (I John 2:16).

"The lust of the flesh" means that it feels good. *"The lust of the eyes"* means that it looks attractive. *"The pride of life"* means that it makes one feel more important. The devil tempted Eve in all three areas in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6), and he tempted Jesus in all three areas also (Matthew 4:1-11). He will tempt you in the same way. Be aware and be strong.

D. The passing of the world is the danger (verse 17). Some people believe that matter is eternal and, though the quality of life on earth may change, the earth will remain. The Bible says that is not so. Second Peter 3:10-14 describes a time when the atoms of the whole universe will split. A great heat will be generated and the whole universe will disintegrate. Nothing will remain as it now is. God will create a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells. Why would a Christian miss eternal rewards by setting his affection on temporary things of earth?

Though the world passes away, the people of God will remain unharmed. They have a kingdom that can never be moved (Hebrews 12:28). They are as secure as God himself, because they are kept by His power.

Do you find an encouragement to keep on growing because of the truths reviewed above? You should. It is better further on. The more you grow in Christ the more you will experience and enjoy your inheritance in Him. Keep on growing. Never stop as long as you live. God has much more for you than you ever dreamed. Grow up in Him who is your head. That is your Christian birthright.

1. What does it mean to “grow in grace”?
2. What is the challenge of Ephesians 4:15?
3. How can you know if you are growing spiritually?
4. What is the mark of spiritual “little children”?
5. What is the mark of spiritual “young men”?
6. What is the mark of spiritual “fathers”?
7. How is the Bible related to spiritual growth?
8. How is the world an enemy to spiritual growth?
9. What can you do to overcome the world this week?
10. What can you do to promote spiritual growth this week?