SPIRITUAL GROWTH
Sunday, June 28, 2020
12:15 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Br. Aaron Kuehmichel

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"If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." – 2 Peter 1:10.

1.) What analogy is used to illustrate the need for growth and development spiritually? Par. 1-3

2.) Why should we put forth conscious effort to grow spiritually? Par. 4-8

3.) **Faith and Virtue:** What does it mean to trust implicitly and to live Virtuously? Par. 9-11

4.) **Knowledge and Temperance:** What does 'growing in knowledge' and 'being Temperate' mean? Par. 12-13

5.) **Patience and Godliness:** How does one be patient and Godly in our present culture? Par. 14-16

6.) **Brotherly Kindness and Love:** What is the difference between these two? Where does one stop and the other start? Par. 17-19

7.) This article concludes with some reminders about our need for personal diligence in our spiritual growth. Did anything resonate with you as you read / studied this? Par. 20-23

Additional Things to Think About:

How would you illustrate 2 Pet, 1:5-7,10? Why?

What can we (the Ecclesia) and I (personally) do to help one another grow spiritually?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

"If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." – 2 Peter 1:10.

1. THERE is a philosophy in the growth and development of Christian character, just as truly as in the growth and development of vegetation; and the more thoroughly we acquaint ourselves with the natural processes and conditions of development and growth in either case, the better we shall understand how to cultivate and to secure the desirable end – maturity and luxuriant fruitfulness. The farmer who puts into practice only what he has learned by accident, in a haphazard way, and who is goaded to effort only by sheer necessity, must not expect the fruitful fields, the abundant harvests and the well-earned approbation of the enterprising, thrifty farmer who has made a study of the business and has brought knowledge, carefully gleaned, together with enterprise and energy, to his assistance in the work

2. Take, for example, a fruit tree. If one, knowing nothing about the necessity for cultivation, simply plants the tree and lets it alone, its strength, instead of producing fruit, will generally go toward making wood and leaves; worms and decay may attack its roots, insects may sting and blight its scanty fruitage; and if it continues to stand, it will be only a useless, fruitless cumberer of the ground, an advertisement of the farmer's negligence and worthy only of having the axe laid to its root. Had it been pruned and trimmed and kept free from insects, etc., under the blessing of God's air and rain and sunshine, it would have been a fruitful, creditable tree; for the laws of nature are true and faithful in all their operations.

3. And none the less rigid are the operations of moral law in the growth and development of moral character. Under proper conditions and with proper, diligent cultivation, the character will grow and develop according to fixed laws, and will become beautiful and fruitful in blessings to self and others; or, lacking the necessary cultivation, even under favorable natural conditions, it will be deformed, worthless and fruitless.

4. When we presented our bodies as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable through the merit of our Redeemer, we there received the spirit of adoption to the spirit plane, as spiritual sons of God; and from that time the faculties and dispositions of our mortal bodies were reckoned as our new being, now under the direction and control of the Spirit of God. The faithfulness with which we cultivate this reckoned new nature, by persistently weeding out old habits of thought and action, supplanting them with new virtues, and training them to activity in the Divine service, is to prove our worthiness or unworthiness of the actual new nature to be received at the resurrection, to which perfect spirit condition our present reckoned condition stands related as embryotic; for the character and disposition of the embryo New Creature will be the disposition of the perfected New Creature, when born in the resurrection.

5. The Apostle affirms (Rom. 8:11) that if we really have the Spirit of God in us – unless we quench it or put it away from us – it will quicken our mortal bodies, make them alive toward God, active in growing into his likeness and fruitful in Christian graces and activities. Again he adds, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his," and "As many

as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." – Rom. 8:9,14.

6. It is our business, therefore, to ***grow;*** to cultivate in ourselves those dispositions which are worthy of us as spiritual sons of God, called to be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

The Development Of Christian Character Is A Gradual, Daily Life-Work

7. The Apostle Peter tells us how to proceed in the matter of cultivating Christian character, intimating that we cannot do it all in a day, nor in a few days, but that it must be a gradual, daily life-work, a process of addition – adding virtue to virtue and grace to grace, day by day and hour by hour. He says, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue [fortitude]; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance [self-control]; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity [love]." Then he adds, "If ye do these things ye shall never fall." – 2 Pet. 1:5-7,10.

8. This is a very strong assurance – that if we do these things we are ***sure to stand approved of God***. We do well, therefore, to consider them with ***special care***. Here are eight elements which must go toward making up the Christian character, the one to be added to the other and assimilated by the spiritual germ of the new nature, until the embryo New Creature is formed; and then it must continue to grow and develop. Look at them again. They are:

1. Faith.	5. Patience.
2. Virtue [fortitude].	6. Godliness.
3. Knowledge.	7. Brotherly kindness.
4. Temperance [self-control].	8. Charity [love].

"A Thus, Saith The Lord," Should Be The End Of All Controversy

9. Now for a little self-examination. Let each ask himself: **(1)** Have I the ***faith*** to which the Apostle here refers; not faith in every thing or every person, but faith in God – in his Plan of redemption through the vicarious, or substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and in all his rich promises built upon that sure foundation? Do I trust him implicitly? Is a "Thus saith the Lord" the end of all controversy, the solution of all doubts and the restful assurance in every perplexity?

10. **(2)** Am I endeavoring to lead a ***virtuous*** life? This, to the child of God, consecrated to be a living sacrifice, implies much more than merely abstaining from evil. It implies living truthfully, that is, ***true to his covenant***, which to wilfully violate would be equivalent to swearing falsely. It is ***fortitude***, strength of character in righteousness. It implies the cultivation of the strictest integrity in our dealings, both with God and with our fellowmen, scrupulous honesty, justice and truth being the only standards.

11. The Psalmist clearly defines it thus, saying, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth ***in his heart***. He that backbiteth

not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor; in whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not [who will not violate a contract found to be unfavorable to himself]. He that putteth not out his money to usury [taking unjust advantage of the necessities of others], nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved." (Psa. 15:2-5.) Such a one is a virtuous man, a man of fortified or strong character. How we need to invoke Divine assistance here! and how critically to judge ourselves!

12. **(3)** Am I endeavoring day by day to gain a more thorough and complete ***knowledge*** of God, of the Plan revealed in his Word, and of the special features now in operation, that I may co-operate with him in its execution; and of his will concerning ***me*** in the particular relationships and conditions in which I now stand – ***irrespective of my own will and disposition in any matter?*** Am I striving to gain this knowledge of God and of his righteous will concerning us, as revealed through his Word, by the holy Spirit? Neglect of this Divinely appointed means of knowledge is equivalent to setting up our own imperfect standard of righteousness and ignoring the Divine standard. It is, therefore, important that we give ***all diligence*** to the study of the Divine Oracle, that we may be fortified in faith and works accordingly.

13. **(4)** Am I ***temperate***, moderate, exercising ***self-control*** in all things – in eating, in drinking, in home arrangements, in conduct, in thoughts, in words, in deeds? Do I realize that self-control is one of the most important elements of good character? "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city," is the counsel of the Wise Man; and many a victorious general has yet to learn to conquer and control ***himself***. Self-control has do with all our sentiments, thoughts, tastes, appetites, labors, pleasures, sorrows and hopes. Its cultivation, therefore, means a high order of character-development. Self-control, accompanied by faith, fortitude, knowledge from on High, implies increased zeal and activity in Divine things, and increased moderation in earthly things. In judgment, in conduct, in the regulation of temporal affairs, etc., "Let your moderation [temperance, self-control] be known unto all men." (Phil. 4:5.) Let them see by our thoughtful (not rash and hasty), careful and considerate demeanor, in every affair of life, that we honor our profession.

14. **(5)** Am I ***patient*** under trial and discipline, keeping my feelings always under the control of enlightened reason, letting patience have its perfect work in cultivating the character, however severely the plow and the harrow may break up the sub-soil of the heart, meekly submitting to the discipline in every case? and am I submitting ***cheerfully*** under the mighty hand of God, in his work of preparing me for a place in his Kingdom soon to be established? The Greek word from which patience is here translated means ***cheerful endurance***.

15. **(6)** Am I carefully observing and endeavoring to ***pattern my character*** and course of action ***after the Divine model?*** If a parent, or in any position of authority, am I using that authority as God uses his – not for selfish purposes, to make a boast of it, or in any way to oppress or trample upon the God-given individual rights of

those under such authority, but for the blessing and advantage of those under it, even to the extent of self-denial, with patience, dignity and grace, and not with boastful imperiousness, which is the attitude of tyrants?

16. If a son, or one under authority to any extent, do I consider the example of loving obedience furnished us in the example of our dear Lord? His delight was to do the Father's will at any cost to himself. As a man, under the kingdoms, authorities, of this world, and as a youth, under the authority of earthly parents, he was loyal and faithful (Matt. 22:21; Luke 2:51); yet all of this earthly authority was exercised by his personal inferiors, even though they were his legal superiors. How beautifully we shall be able to grace and fill whatever station we occupy in life, if we carefully study and copy ***godliness*** (God-likeness), whether we be princes or peasants, masters or servants!

17. **(7)** Does ***brotherly-kindness*** characterize all my actions? Does it cause me to make due allowance for the inherited weaknesses and circumstantial misfortunes of others? Does brotherly-kindness deal patiently and helpfully so far as wisdom, with a view to the correction of those faults, may dictate; and even at the expense of self-interest, if necessary and prudent?

18. If, as I look myself squarely in the face, I recognize deformity of character, do I thankfully accept a brother's proffered aid and meekly bear reproof, determining that by the grace of God I will overcome such dispositions, and prove myself a help rather than a hindrance to others, if it should even cost my life to do it; and that I will no longer foster my old dispositions, but will plunge into activity in the service of God with those who should have my co-operation in service, instead of being a burden to them?

19. **(8)** Have I ***charity (love unfeigned)*** for the unrighteous and unlovely, as well as for the good and beautiful – a love which is ever ready to manifest itself in wise and helpful activity for saint and sinner; a love which pities, helps, comforts, cheers and blesses all within its reach; which longs for the grand opportunities and power and glory of the incoming Age, chiefly for its privileges of scattering universal blessing; and which, in harmony with that sentiment, utilizes every present opportunity wisely and in harmony with the Divine Plan for the accomplishment of the same end – thus manifesting and cultivating the disposition which must be found in every member of that glorious company which will constitute the King's Cabinet in the incoming Age? If this disposition is not begun, cultivated and developed ***here***, we shall not be considered worthy of that office ***there***.

20. Just as in a well-kept orchard pruning, trimming and cultivation are necessary to accomplish the desired end of fruitfulness, so must we be watchful and take necessary precautions to prevent blight and decay of character, and to guard against the intrusion of evil powers and influences calculated to sap the life of the New Creature. By resisting the Devil he will flee from us; and by patient continuance in well-doing an increasing measure of development will result. "If these things be in you and abound," says the Apostle Peter (that is, if you have them in some measure and keep on cultivating them, so that they abound more and more and ***rule*** in you), "they make you that ye shall be neither barren [idle] nor

unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Truth is for such: "Light is sown for the ***righteous***," and they are ***sure to get it***. They shall not walk in darkness. If any man will ***do*** the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine. (John 7:17.) "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath ***forgotten*** that he was purged from his old sins."

Let Us Give All Diligence In These Matters

21. "Wherefore, brethren, ***give diligence*** to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things [if you diligently cultivate this disposition] ye shall ***never fall***." Being justified fully, by faith in the sacrifice of Christ for your redemption and sanctification (setting apart from the world and devotion to the service of God) by the Truth, your final selection to that position of glory, honor and immortality, to which you are called, shall be ***sure***. For "so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

21. "Wherefore," again says our beloved Brother Peter, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things. Yea, I think it meet so long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance....Moreover, I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." This Peter did; and the Church to this day may profit by his brotherly counsel.

22. While the Apostle Peter, addressing the consecrated, thus clearly and explicitly points out the way in which we may make our calling and election sure to the chief favor of God, the Apostle Paul, addressing the same class, shows that wilful and continual neglect to develop and cultivate the Christian character, involves the loss, not only of the chief favor of the High Calling, but, eventually, of all favor. He wrote, "If ye [ye who have solemnly covenanted to sacrifice your ***very life*** in the service of God, for the eradication of evil] live after the flesh [with selfish effort, merely to gratify self] ye shall die." (Rom. 8:13.) God has no use or place for wilful covenant-breakers and covenant-despisers, after they have been brought to a knowledge of the Truth and of his will, and have covenanted to do it faithfully.

23. With all our striving and watchfulness, however, we shall not be able, in our present condition, to reach our ideal. Perfection is something which can only be approximated in the present life. But ***the measure of our effort to attain it*** will prove the measure of our faithfulness and earnest desire to do so. And that effort will not be unfruitful. If no fruit appears, we may be sure that little or no effort is made at cultivation, pruning, etc. The fruit will appear, not only in the development of the Christian graces of character, but also in increasing activities. We must not wait for our immortal bodies, promised us in our resurrection, before our activity in God's service begins. If we possess the spirit [the will, the disposition] of that new nature, our ***mortal*** bodies will be active in the service of God's Truth ***now***. Our feet will be swift to run his errands, our hands prompt to do his bidding, our tongues ready to bear testimony to the Truth, our minds active in devising ways and means to do so more and more abundantly and effectively. Thus we

shall be living epistles, known and read of all about us – an honor to him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.