

## **Growth or Backsliding**

Are we growing in grace or are we backsliding?

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In all creation growth always indicates the presence of life, and whenever this ceases, the reason is certainly either disease or death. This is also the case with those who, in Christ, have part in new creation (2. Corinthians 5:17). All the children of God are born of water and of the Spirit, and in this way enter into the Kingdom of God, as we learn in John 3. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has chosen them in Him before the foundation of the world, having predestinated them unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself. They are accepted in the Beloved, in whom they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Having trusted in Christ, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of the inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession. Thus, having been made children of God, they become His heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ, and members of the household of God.

But as in natural life, in which all human beings commence their earthly career as babes, and gradually grow into mature age, so the believer is first seen as a babe in Christ. We read in 1. John 2 of little children, young men, and fathers. This implies steady growth, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man" (Ephesians 4:13). The apostle adds: "That we henceforth be no more children ... but grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ." On all sides the Christian is surrounded by the adversary and his servants, seeking to overthrow him, and thus bring dishonor on Christ; therefore the apostle bids him put on the whole armor of God, in order that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. As long as the Christian is in this world, warfare never ceases. To enter into a truce with the enemy is fatal; spiritual growth then ceases, for the soul never stands still, and backsliding inevitably takes the place of growth. This is a most solemn truth, and every believer should earnestly ponder over it, and take it to heart. A most important piece of the armour of God is the shield of faith, wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

The young Thessalonian Church had taken earnest heed to this, since the apostle writes: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly." Peter, writing to those who had obtained like precious faith, warns them lest any, being led away with the error of the wicked, should fall from their own steadfastness, and urges them to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Growth is always the proof of a healthy state of soul. John, writing to the well-beloved Gaius, says, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

Seeing then that growth in grace should be the normal condition of every believer, and indeed the proof of spiritual life in his soul, let us see what the Spirit says to us with regard to our daily life, and how we should walk so as to avoid the terrible danger of backsliding.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Again, in Colossians we read: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above...set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). There are many other similar verses, but

the great point constantly urged by the Spirit is occupation with Christ, so that the blessed Man in the glory may become the one object of the heart, even as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians, "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And a little later he adds, "Brethren, be followers together of me."

Minding earthly things is one of the greatest dangers in these last days: it is indeed the very opposite of seeking those things which are above. And we can only be pre-served from this by constantly using the shield of faith.

We have great need to "be sober, to be vigilant; because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," but whom we must resist, steadfast in the faith.

The words backslider and backsliding are not found in the New Testament, but as applied to Israel are frequently used in the writings of the Prophets. One verse, however, I think we should meditate upon, namely: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Proverbs 14:14). Our blessed Lord Jesus specially craves the love of our hearts; has He Himself not proved His heart's love by laying down His life for us? Shall we then let our hearts be taken up by the things of this world which has cast Him out, and still despises and rejects Him? The time is indeed very short, and now only can we prove that our love for Him is true, by taking our stand faithfully by His side in the day of His rejection.