

Our Need for Spiritual Progress

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Spiritual progress in a person's life can take a long time to take place, because, to start with we had no knowledge of God at all, and the human nature we are born with is in open rebellion against God. A person would not want to have anything to do with God, since that is like an inborn dislike in our heart. A person living in rebellion and sins of the world is warned, however, (James 4:4) "Ye adulterers and adulteresses" (and we could include coveters, thieves, and people with enmity, envy, unholy and passionate desires), "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

The spiritual condition of everyone at their beginning, is to not be able to understand anything of true spiritual value, since we would not know anything about God, nor have an understanding of His Word, and no one of themselves, has the ability to change that inward condition. A complete revolution and a total conversion of heart by the Holy Spirit must take place (to make us opposite to what we were).

Our original condition is described clearly in the Bible (Rom.3: 11-12): "There is 'no one' who understands, no one who diligently seeks God. All have turned away from the right path, they have together become worthless [corrupt and unprofitable]; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Those verses remove the cover, and they reveal our true spiritual condition at the beginning of our Christian life.)

However, God's Word informs us that the power of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us, can take that wrong spiritual condition out of our heart (if we will truly believe on what He accomplished on the Cross.) (Rom.6:6) "This we know—that our old self was nailed to the cross with Him, in order that our sinful nature might be deprived of its power, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin;" [And Romans 6:10-11, to be made note of later in this message, fully confirms and supports this statement given in verse 6.]

Therefore, a provision for our heart to be changed, is embedded in the center of God's love for us, as He provided a way for our heart to be changed through faith in His Son, (a faith which allows the Holy Spirit to enable us rapid progress that is needed concerning our faith in the *Son of God*). If we keep that "faith in Christ priority" in the forefront of our mind and memory, we will very soon see 'spiritual progress' being made, as we will realize that we are being guided by God's Spirit in making Scriptural decisions in circumstances that we face (and not deciding to follow ways of the world). We all need to realize that there is no remaining 'neutral', (no standing still) in the Christian life of faith, as we either go forward, or go backward.

Surely, we must make forward progress through seeing by faith, ... and the Bible informs us of how we should see ourselves when we keep our 'faith on Christ's atoning sacrifice'. (Gal.2:20) "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me; and the life which I now live in the body I live through faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up to death on my behalf."

Satan tries constantly through suggestions to our mind, to convince us that we must be going backward because of the trials, troubles, and tests that we meet. He is always telling us that we will never be able to do what is right and will never be 'overcomers in the faith'. Satan will put such thoughts in the minds of those who are spiritually alive and who want to make progress in the Truth.

Satan will try to tempt everyone, so we need to be very careful not to allow the devil to have us to be questioning whether or not we are making progress. We must always remember that Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice for us on the Cross, and that gives each one of us a perfect right to claim His righteousness and believe that His Spirit is now living in us. We should not lose sight of that fact, because it is the Holy Spirit Who enables us to make spiritual progress.

Satan will do anything he can to convince us that we are not where we should be spiritually; that we are not free from sin; or that self is still in control of our heart. However, Scripture states clearly, that the atoning work of Christ on the Cross is still (and will always be) there for us to take our stand of faith on; and His shed Blood and the power of His resurrection to life, releases us from that control of sin, self, and Satan (that we were born with). We are delivered from that old self-nature, and we are now controlled by the new nature from God, for that is His statement and testimony to us.

Bible believers who accepted that testimony of a blood-atonement sacrifice, were freed from sin, from self, and from Satan, and became righteous in the sight of God. How much more would we be free, when we believe God's testimony about the true Passover Lamb's sacrifice!

In our natural state, we were deserving of death. God knew, however, that we were not responsible for that horrible spiritual condition born within us. God knows that everyone is (Psalm 51:5) born "in iniquity; and (that) in sin did my mother conceive me." All of that happened without our consent, so we find ourselves in a world with two enemies within ourselves, and through no choice of our own.

We do not even know they are in our heart, so it is only when God enlightens us and He begins to teach us, that we find out about it. We can then realize what a terrible spiritual condition we had, and if we face the facts with courage and fortitude, we will surely welcome God's help to bring-about the needed change in our heart.

God, in His mercy and love for us, sent His Son to die in our place, and take all our sins, sorrows, poverty, pain and weakness upon Himself. Also, to give us God's peace; divine health, and everything else His presence and power could provide us with. All of this is through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus died for us on the Cross, it was the same as if we had died. It is vital that we understand that, and believe it, so we can make spiritual progress in the Christian life. Wherever we believe ourselves to be spiritually, we will then live according to that level of faith and belief.

If we are deceived to believe that we are not 'dead to sin', and that there is still some of Satan's control within us; and that we are not 'living for God' through 'faith in Christ', ... we will not rise above that. Satan will have the advantage over us, and his influence will be seen in the way we talk, and walk, and treat those around us.

If we believe we have the Spirit of God within us, and we hold that position, 'spiritual progress' will result. Satan will always try to get us away from our stand of faith, and if we allow him to convince us we are not delivered, (then we will act as if we were not delivered). Progress will be hindered or halted, and God's power delayed in giving the victory.

Jesus' Atonement and resurrection to life tells us clearly what that has made us to be; reveals what it gave us; and where it places us spiritually, physically, financially, and with everything else. We all believe the story of God's creation, that Adam was righteous and created in God's image; that he enjoyed perfect health and peace and had every need provided. That was the first creation.

Since Jesus died on the Cross and God raised Him to life, we now have a new second creation. If we believe in this re-creation, as we do with the first creation, we will then partake of its benefits.

(2 Cor.5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

God considers the resurrection of His Son, as if all believers were resurrected to a new righteous life with good health. By faith we are connected to Christ, so that when we believe and accept that in faith, then God can take possession of our life. It is much spiritual gain for us to believe God's testimony about His Son's atonement sacrifice on our behalf.

(2 Cor.5:17-18) "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away", ... all those old things and attitudes as the result of Adam's sin, have "become new. Now all things are of God" (just like the first creation), "Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

It has become a new life of faith and trust on God now that Jesus is alive. (Romans 6:10-11) "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ our Lord." (God takes the responsibility for results when He tells us to consider (or to reckon) ourselves, and so, that we are to see ourselves in that light given us in His Word.

We are to (and need to) confess and forsake every sin, and to really believe those sins are forgiven. As we hold that position of trust on God (by faith in the atoning Blood of Christ), we will then conduct our life according to that belief that we have in our heart. The devil wants us to believe that some of those sins still remain in

us, and of course, that something has not been confessed nor forsaken. We will always live by what we believe.

We know from (1 John 1:9) that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Through Jesus' atoning Blood, we are clean and righteous in His sight. God promised that easy path for us to be forgiven, cleansed, and delivered, and He is just asking us to have a willingness to confess our sins to Him, and then to forsake those sins by His grace and guidance. God is always faithful to forgive, and we need to always keep that in memory (especially so, when Satan tries to convince us that we have not been forgiven through the cleansing power of Jesus' Blood after we have sincerely confessed and forsaken sins.

When we present our life as a "living sacrifice" to God (for Him to mold us as a potter molds the clay in his hands), God accepts us and takes possession of our life, and He gives us His Holy Spirit (as He promised for true believers), so that we can stay free from sin. God's will is to always be our way, and His Word is to always be our guide in life. (Proverbs 4:23) "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

We should take advantage of what God provided, (freedom from sin and a new nature within our heart). Anything that we view as the Blood of Christ has made it to be (as the Word of God says that it is), can become reality. As we see things in that light, it enables spiritual progress to be made in our life. (Ephes.5:15-16) "Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity [Redeeming the time], because the days are evil."

We should get full spiritual benefit of everything that touches our life. If the devil gets us to move away from that stand of faith and trust, we need to re-surrender our life to God again, but being more definite about it this time to believe what Jesus did for us on the Cross. Everything that pertains to us in this life; (also, for us to attain eternal Life and to escape the torment of the Lake of Fire), "depends on our making spiritual progress" by maintaining that stand of faith on the atonement Blood of Christ.

[That means to stay-connected to Christ by faith, so that we can be enabled to bear that most necessary "spiritual fruit" (John 15:4-7) "Continue in me, and let me continue in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself—that is, if it does not continue in the vine—so neither can you if you do not continue in me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who continues in me and in whom I continue bears abundant fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If any one does not continue in me, he is like the unfruitful branch which is at once thrown away and then withers up. Such branches they gather up and throw into the fire and they are burned. If you continue in me and my sayings continue in you, ask what you will and it shall be done for you." (That is quite a promise for staying connected to Christ and bearing 'spiritual fruit' through Him).

The divine order for progress to be made in the Christ-life, is first, the 'Blood of Christ'; then the power of God; and third, God's

Word as the Guide and plan for us to follow toward the Kingdom in Heaven. When we have taken the first step (believe on the cleansing power of 'Blood of Christ'), we are then in good position to take the next step. When we have a clean heart, we will have a thirst for more Truth. Everyone needs to be enlightened to what the will of God is, and, have the desire to do His will, which is made possible by the Holy Spirit, Who wrote the Word.

We need to thoroughly understand and know the directions given in the New Testament. Everyone is responsible to find out, to believe, and to obey the New Testament Scriptures which are plainly written, and they include every aspect of one's life; in the home; when at workplaces; with regard to and in response to wrongs, insults, and all unfair treatment; and with financial issues and every other matter.

No one has a right to resent anything from anyone. If our heart is truly made clean (and we have the Holy Spirit within our heart), we will have no problem to forgive those who sin against us. If we really believe the testimony of God's Son, we will truly see ourselves where the Word says we are, not what we think; not what we feel, and not believe what the devil says to us.

God's Word clearly tells us what to do concerning any trouble, illness, or financial problem. The attitude that we take toward God's Word, should be proof of our believing what God has said about what His Son accomplished for us. Any repentant person who has had self and Satan removed from their heart, would have no problem obeying God's Word in their life. They would, in fact, be glad to follow His instructions in their life.

Jesus said (Matt.7:20) "by their fruits ye shall know them." The disciples had no problem selling their possessions, giving to the poor, and depending on God for their daily needs. Once they had the Holy Spirit within themselves, their fruits were easily recognized, and it was only natural for them to react in those ways.

God's Words are not understood via our own knowledge and intellect. We have to pray for God's enlightenment on them, for instance, our having a deep understanding of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which is a pure and classic example of God's divine Truth and His guidance for our life. Our prayer should be that God will open our mind to the Word, so that we can receive the full benefit of its teaching and making spiritual progress in the Christian life.

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#S229R MAIN POINT:

1 ... Throughout the message it is emphasized that we must make spiritual progress in the true Christian life, so the self-life (that everyone since Adam has been born with), must be revealed and removed via the Holy Spirit working in a heart that is surrendered to God.

The First Century Gospel Church/Philadelphia