**Being a Christian Requires Growth**

In the Parable of the Talents, one servant received five talents. He was found faithful because of what he did with those talents. "So, he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' (Matthew 25:20-2) His Master wanted to see growth. Does our Lord require any less of us?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke of how we find growth, what happens when we do not produce fruit, and what happens when we do produce fruit. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” (John 15:1-6) In this passage growth is defined as bearing fruit. Just as a branch cut off from the vine cannot bear fruit, so a person not in Christ will likewise be fruitless.

The first issue is to connect to Christ. This occurs when one obeys the Gospel of Christ. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27) When one is baptized, they are added to the church, Acts 2.47; they become part of the body of Christ, Ephesians 1.22-23; and in John 15 they are people abiding in Christ. But for what purpose? Just as a grape vine’s branches bears grapes, those in Christ are to “bear fruit.” What is this fruit? Some might think it as converting others to Christ. But I would suggest in our passage it refers to being changed into the image of Christ. The Fruit of the Spirit in Galations 5.22-24 gives us a list of qualities which we should cultivate in our lives. A similar passage is 2 Peter 1.5-7 which ends with these words in verse 8, “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What happens when the vinedresser comes and see and unproductive branch? He cuts it off, John 15. Such a one is not growing and being faithful in Christ. This points out the necessity of spiritual growth in our lives.

What about that productive, good fruit bearing branch? It is pruned so as to produce even more fruit. God uses those who are usable. We should want to grow in our abilities and desire to do more and more.

Too many Christians are like those described at Corinth. “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) Paul was not chastising them for being babes in Christ but for not growing to have a greater understanding and ability to take on the “solid food” in the Gospel of Christ. We know from reading more of 1 Corinthians, the brethren there had not left behind their previous way of thinking. Or as in the last article, they had not pulled out the weeds and nor softened their hearts to grow.

Much the same idea is expressed in Hebrews, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14) Everyone starts as a newborn Christian with things to learn and room for growth. But why is it some do not grow; they remain weak and unstable for years? Most will eventually drift away from God due to spiritual immaturity.

Peter says growth comes from God’s word; “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (1 Peter 2:2-3) Babies naturally want food. They will let everyone know when they are hungry. Feed a child, and except for some type of illness or physical problem, they will grow and grow and grow. A newborn who starts losing weight is not natural. So, it is for a new Christian. Study the word of God, go to Bible classes, listen to the sermons, and you will grow. A Christian who is not growing is not taking in the Word of God. This may be due to sin in their lives, losing interest in spiritual matters, or some other heart condition. In which case, they need to change. – Dennis Tucker