

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE GROWTH OF FAITH.

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly."—2 Thessalonians i. 3.\*

Beware of imagining that you have reached finality in religion. Just as some politicians have said, "We have gone as far in reform as we ever mean to go, so here we shall stop," certain religious professors say, "We have gone as far in religion as there is any need to go; we are converted, we are saved, so here we shall remain." Beware, I say, of such a spirit as that, but rather imitate the example of the apostle Paul, who wrote, "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." We are not content with merely being alive, we wish to be in health as well as in life; and we ought not to be satisfied with being saved, we should desire to have our faith in full strength, and to have all our graces at the highest degree of development. The men of this world are not usually content with just bread to eat and raiment to put on, they are like those daughters of the horseleech that cry, "Give, give;" but when spiritual things are concerned, these insatiable cravings are not so manifest. Many are content to be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked when they might

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\* Two other Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon, on the same verse, are *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 205, "A Lecture for Little-faith;" and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,857, "The Necessity of Growing Faith."

buy of Christ all spiritual blessings without money and without price. Even those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them are often quite content to lie down just inside the City of Refuge as if they had been sent into this world simply with the selfish end of being saved, and as if there were nothing for them to do in the way of serving God, and reflecting before other men that glory of God which, in his grace, has been made to shine upon them. So again I say, beware of that spirit of finality which would permit you to rest content with your present attainments; for if you are, I shall not be able to thank God that your faith groweth exceedingly, and you will miss the joy that comes to the believer who is growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I am going to speak to you, first, upon *how Christians grow in faith*; secondly, upon *the signs of that growth*; and then, thirdly, I hope to give you *some reasons why we should not be satisfied without this growth in faith*.

I. First, then, let us consider HOW CHRISTIANS GROW IN FAITH.

There are many ways in which the Lord causes faith to grow. One is from *the force of life itself*; it is natural for life to grow until it has reached its maturity. Here is a living seed; if it be put into the earth under proper circumstances, nothing can prevent it from bursting its shell. In due time, the green blade must be seen. You may conjure that green blade to remain at the same length as at present, but if you pass that way in another month, you will find that it has disobeyed your command; for, because it lives, it must grow; and if you should continue to visit it until it bends its head in the ripeness of autumn, you would see that it must, by the very law of its nature, still keep on growing. It is the same with us; the anatomist will tell you that every part of the infant's body is so prepared that it can grow, there is provision for the growth of every organ and every limb so that, slowly and without difficulty, the whole shall be developed into a full-grown man. It is life that grows. Put a bar of iron into the best soil that you can find, water it, and manure it, and let the genial sun shine upon it, but never a leaf or a rootlet will you find upon it, for it is dead. It is not so with the Christian man; because of the life that is in him, he must grow. Ye who are the living branches in the living Vine prove it by your growth. Ye who are the children of God should increase in wisdom and stature, and go on from strength to strength until ye appear in Zion before God. If your faith is as feeble now as it was twenty years ago, if you have not made any spiritual advance during the last ten years, you ought very gravely to question whether you have any spiritual life at all. You may not be able to see the growth, but there must be growth if there is life. There are some plants in which the unseen growth is more valuable than that which is visible; the gardener prizes the potatoes that are underground more than the tops that everyone can see. But with the Christian there must be both the visible growth in zeal and good works and the hidden growth in his deep humility

and communion with his Lord in secret. So the force of life within produces growth.

There are certain circumstances under which believers especially grow, and *they grow in faith by the exercise of faith*. See the blacksmith's boy when he first tries to swing his father's big hammer, how soon he gets tired, but ask the smith whether his arms ache. "Oh, no!" he says, "I have made too many horseshoes for that." Exercise has developed his muscles and strengthened his sinews to such an extent that the bringing down of that big hammer with a merry ring is but child's play to him. So the young Christian, when he begins to exercise faith, can perhaps only imitate him who said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief;" but speak to him, some years later, when his faith has been much exercised, and then you will find that he has grown more like Abraham, who "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." You know that, if you let your arm lie unused, in time you will be unable to use it, like the Indian fakir who holds up his hand in the air until he has lost all power of moving it. So a man may keep his faith unused until it can scarcely be called faith at all; therefore mind that your faith is kept in full exercise for so only will it grow.

Christians also *grow in faith by holy walking*. Living with Jesus,—and to live with him we must be consistent in holiness,—we get to know him better, and to trust him more. It is said of some men that "the better they are known, the less they are trusted," but it is not so with the Lord Jesus Christ. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed, but if there is an agreement between our life and the character of Christ, and we are, by grace, enabled to walk scrupulously in the path of integrity, our faith will grow stronger and stronger as we get to know more of Christ. Sinning is most injurious to faith. I think it is Brookes who says that "either sinning will kill our assurance or our assurance will kill our sinning." Sin indulged will prevent the full assurance of faith, and even a little sin will do this. Have you ever had a small stone in your boot? If so, and you have tried to walk, you have found it very uncomfortable travelling. If you have a tiny splinter of wood beneath your nail, you know how painful it is; you get it extracted as soon as you can, lest you should lose your finger, or even your hand. Beware of little sins, beloved, for they will keep all comfort out of your life, and effectually hinder the growth of your faith.

Another way of helping faith to grow is *by a diligent use of gospel ordinances*. There are some of you who are very lax in this respect; some who come to the Tabernacle twice on the Lord's-day do not come at all during the week. Your bodies would not grow strong if you only fed them once a week, and it is the same with your souls. Prayer-meetings are most soul-fattening ordinances. Many of us can testify that, at such gatherings, we have often been able to say, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." I do not

expect to see you all at the prayer-meetings, for some of you have home and business duties requiring your attention, and these must not be neglected; still, there are many more of you who might come if you would. And while I am speaking of ordinances, I must not forget that very precious one of the Lord's supper, nor its companion, believers' baptism. Both of these are exceedingly helpful to the Christian, and all the means of grace help the growth of faith and every other virtue. Of course I include the private as well as the public means of grace. Private prayer is like a conservatory in which God's plants grow very rapidly. Christians need a temperature higher than this world can give them; they are rare exotics, plants of heavenly birth, and they need divine warmth before they can blossom and bring forth fruit unto perfection, and this can only be obtained by private prayer, secret fellowship with Christ, and devout meditation upon the Scriptures.

I will only further say, upon this point, that *a Christian may expect to grow in faith the more troubles he has*. If you have ever been at sea in a storm, and noticed how unconcerned about it the weather-beaten sailors have been, you must have realized that is was because they had been hardened in many a tempest that they could so calmly go on with their duties while you and other landsmen were in dread of sinking, or longing for the end of the voyage. Storms help to make the sailors sturdy, and trials help to make Christians strong in faith and in every other grace. Damascus blades have to be annealed, and those who are to be like sharp swords in the Lord's hand will have to pass through the fire. The more the wind blows, the firmer will the oak's roots grip the soil.

"March winds and April showers  
Bring forth May flowers;"—

and you, as Christians, must have your stormy times and your rainy days if you are to bring forth the flowers of grace and the fruit of the Spirit. You will probably grow more in the cloudy and dark day of adversity than you will while the sun of prosperity is shining brightly upon you; so be of good courage, beloved, under the most adverse circumstances, for they are working for your lasting good.

II. I will not say more about how Christians grow in faith; but, in the second place, I will try to point out SOME OF THE MARKS AND EVIDENCES OF THAT GROWTH.

First, however, let me say that *swelling is not necessarily growing*. We know some people who seem to fancy that they have grown in grace because they have such big notions as to their own attainments. They evidently imagine that they are the people, and that wisdom will die with them. We never like to see a child with too big a head, for we fear it is only an indication of disease, and not a sign of health; and we fear that many professors of religion are suffering in a similar fashion. They know too much, for they are wise above

what is written, and are not content to be teachable, and to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, the great Teacher.

But there is such a thing as true growing, and this can be seen in various ways. First, if you are growing in faith, *Christ becomes increasingly precious to you*. Perhaps you walked by a park one day, and you said to yourself, "That is a very pretty place." Possibly, the next time you went that way, somebody said to you, "I should not wonder if that estate should belong to you some day;" and that made you take a much more personal interest in it. By-and-by, the owner died, and you learned that he had left the estate to you; how greatly your interest in it increased then, and how much more you valued the mansion, the park, the gardens, and everything belonging to the estate! In like manner, Christ was precious to me when I first began to hope that he might one day be mine, he was more precious to me when I first realized that he really was mine, and the more fully I am assured of my interest in him, the more precious does he become to me. This is the best test I can give you, beloved, the most accurate thermometer by which you can ascertain the rise or fall of your spiritual temperature,—Is Christ Jesus more precious to you than he ever was before? If so, then I am bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because your faith groweth exceedingly.

Further, if you are growing in faith, *you want to be more like Christ*, and you are more and more dissatisfied with yourself because you are so little like him. You are longing to be so completely conformed to his image that all the virtues of his character shall be reflected and reproduced in you. It is a sure proof of genuine faith in Christ that it produces likeness to him, and growth in faith is good evidence of growth in likeness to him. Art thou more like Christ than thou wast years ago, or dost thou desire above everything else to be more and more like him? If so, my brother or sister, I feel confident that thou art growing in faith, and I thank God that it is so.

"Lord, if thou thy grace impart,  
Poor in spirit, meek in heart,  
I shall as my Master be,  
Rooted in humility."

Another evidence of growing in faith is that *the promises become more consolatory to us*, and our heart and mind are kept more restful under their gracious influence. On board ship, though the vessel may rock and reel, and turn whichever way the helmsman may guide, the faithful needle always points to the pole; and it is the same with the true Christian.

"Let cares like a wild deluge come,  
And storms of sorrow fall,"—

his faith still points to heaven, his trust is fixed on Jesus. Whatever

else may move, he remains firm and steadfast, and he cries, as David did when he was hunted by Saul as a partridge upon the mountains, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." I do not know whether your experience is similar to mine, but I find myself, on the whole, more equable in spiritual things than I used to be. When one has known the Lord for fourteen years, one can look back over a considerable period; and taking such a survey as that, I can discover certain times when I had great bursts of exhilaration, great heights of holy joy, followed by deep sinking of spirit and utter prostration of soul. I have both those experiences still at times, but not often either of them now. On the whole, I find my soul calmly and quietly resting upon the promises of God, neither unduly delighted at the prospect of the joys of heaven nor too much depressed by the cares of the world, the responsibilities of my ministry, or the sin that still troubles me; but just simply resting upon the rock Christ Jesus, having few doubts and fears, and a comforting assurance of salvation, but not so much of the ecstatic rapture that was one of the characteristics of my early faith. I suppose that this is the condition of many Christians, and I am inclined to regard it as one of the evidences of growth in grace when we become more equable in our spiritual temperament. Children are very much excited over matters which a full-grown man scarcely notices; and the spiritual child is swayed hither and thither by many winds which have little or no effect upon one who has come to the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus.

*Love to the saints* is another choice and clear proof of the growth of faith. In the verse from which our text is taken, Paul thanks God, "as it is meet," for the two graces which he perceives in the church of the Thessalonians: "because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity (or, love) of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." So love to the saints is thus linked with the growth of faith. We want far more true Christian love toward one another, though probably we have less cause for complaint in that respect than most other communities have, for we have learned the blessedness of dwelling together in unity. In some of our churches there is still far too much caste feeling, too much bowing down before rank and fashion. I met, the other day, with a pretty story concerning Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry, the commentator. He wanted to marry the daughter of a gentleman who was one of his hearers. The father of the young lady said to her, "I have no personal objection to Mr. Henry; he is a good man, a Christian gentleman, but I do not know where he came from, so I cannot consent to your marriage with him." "Well, father," said the young lady, "though we don't know where he came from, we do know where he is going, and I would like to go there with him." When I meet a genuine Christian, I may not know where he came from; he may have sprung, as men say, from the dunghill, his parents may have been the poorest of the poor, but what does that matter? I know where he is going, and that is a much more important consideration; he is going to the upper house

where there are many mansions; he is going to the palace of the great King eternal, immortal, invisible, where the princes of the blood-royal are for ever to bask in the sunshine of the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and I would like to go with him that I may form one of that blessed company. Never mind the corduroy or the fustian that the man may wear, or the cotton or calico of the poor woman, I love them as brethren and sisters in Christ, and I want to go to the heaven whither they are bound. The real test of a man's nobility is not, "Whence did he come?" but "Whither is he going?" If he is going where the people of God are going, if God is his Father, and Jesus Christ is his Saviour, and the Holy Spirit is his Guide and Counsellor, if heaven is the haven whither he is bound, it will be one of the proofs that your faith is growing if you feel an intense love for him, and wish to share with him all the blessings of the covenant of grace in time and throughout eternity.

Another sign of the growth of faith is *the growth of zeal*. I cannot see a man's faith, but I can see the evidences that it is growing when I perceive how zealous he is in all good works for his Lord. When a train travels at a very rapid rate, the axles grow hot; and the greater the speed, the greater is the heat that is generated by the friction; and, in like manner, the more rapidly a man travels in the path of a divine life by faith, the greater is the earnestness which he displays in the service of Christ. Dost thou care but little for the souls of those around thee? Art thou not doing all that thou canst to bring glory to God by the extension of the kingdom of Christ amongst the sons of men? Then we cannot thank God that thy faith is growing exceedingly. Indeed, there is grave cause to fear whether thou dost possess the faith of God's elect if this evidence is lacking. Remember that question of the apostle James, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" and his very emphatic answer, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." I find it well often to adopt those lines of Dr. Watts, and would advise you to do the same,—

"Awake my zeal, awake my love,  
To serve my Saviour here below,  
In works which perfect saints above,  
And holy angels cannot do.

"Awake my charity, to feed  
The hungry soul, and clothe the poor:  
In heaven are found no sons of need,  
There all these duties are no more."

And the more faith you have, *the more liberality will you display*. I do not wonder that some people give so little to the cause of God; they give only as much (or, as little) as they believe. It is said that Dean Swift, preaching from the text, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord: and that which he hath given will he pay him again," made this characteristic commencement to his

sermon, "If you like the security, down with the dust!" It seems as if there were many people, nowadays, who do not like the security, for they keep their "sordid dust" to themselves, hoarding it up for those who come after them to scatter as they please. But the more a man believes in the security of godliness, the more will he give to the poor, and to the cause of Christ, and to every worthy object that he can help. After all, the great stimulant to Christian liberality is that which Paul used when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich;" or that which the Master himself used with his disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give."

If I were to try to tell you all the good which growth in faith will do to us, I should need to keep you here all night. I was much struck with a remark that I read, the other day, to the effect that faith may be compared to the gastric juice in the stomach. When that solvent is in a healthy state, all the food that is eaten is properly dissolved and digested, and then the entire man becomes healthy from head to foot; but if anything should be amiss with this necessary fluid, then everything will go wrong. So, a growing faith is essential to a healthy spiritual life. Let faith be in increasingly vigorous exercise, then the whole life will benefit; but let faith become feeble and inactive, then the whole of your spiritual being will be weakened and injured. I will dare even to say that faith affects heaven, and earth, and hell. If you have but little faith, you cannot tread the world beneath your feet, nor laugh at its troubles, nor smile at its cares. If you have but little faith, you cannot open the windows of heaven, you cannot bring down a blessing from God. Even hell itself feels the influence of your faith. Satan trembles when he knows that your faith is firm and strong; but if it is tottering and trembling, then he sounds the note of triumph, and seeks to lead on his hosts to make a full end of you because you are beginning to relax your grip of your shield. It was not without good reason that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;" and to the Hebrews, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." The Lord grant that we may have cause always to thank him because your faith groweth exceedingly!

III. I intended, before closing my discourse, to give you SOME REASONS WHY WE SHOULD NOT BE SATISFIED WITHOUT THIS GROWTH IN FAITH; but my time has almost gone, and I hope I have already said sufficient to prove to you the urgent need of an ever-growing faith. For your own soul's sake, for your own happiness and usefulness, for Christ's sake, for sinners' sake, for the Church's sake, if you would adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things, if you would be a blessing to your day and generation, if you would bring into the fold of the good Shepherd the lost sheep and lambs that are wandering away from him, cry continually to him, "Lord, increase our faith."

I have only time for just a word or two with you who have no faith at all. Sad must be the reflections of those of you here who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. What can you mean by such sinful folly? The Son of God has come from heaven to earth seeking the lost, and yet you do not believe in him though you are amongst the lost! A proclamation of liberty is made to you who are slaves to sin and Satan, yet you will not accept the emancipation which would be so great a blessing to you! Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and you have been told, over and over again, that if you will but trust him, you shall be saved even though you are among the chief of sinners; yet you will not believe in him! O soul, why wilt thou not trust in Jesus? Is he not worthy of thy confidence? Where will you find anyone else in all the world who so richly deserves to be trusted? No happy or miserable feelings are needed to fit you for believing in him; no meritorious deeds, no gifts of alms are required as a preparation for faith in him. Jesus Christ can save you just as you are if you will but trust him, so trust him now with your whole heart, and you shall be saved. Trust to him as completely as the drowning man trusts to the lifeboat or the lifebuoy; if he tried to swim to land, he would be lost, his only hope of being saved is in trusting to a power greater than his own. It is just so with thee, sinner; thou art powerless to save thyself, but all power in heaven and in earth has been committed to Christ, he is mighty to save, therefore trust him to save thee. Rest wholly upon what he is as the Christ of God, the anointed and appointed Saviour, and upon what he has done upon Calvary's cross to save all who believe in him, and thou shalt be saved this very hour. Trust Jesus here and now, and thou shalt be saved here and now, and to God shall be all the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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### Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

GENESIS XXII. 1-19.

Verse 1. *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt\*—*  
That is, "God did test or try"—

1, 2. *Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Beho'd, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son,*

"But, Lord, I have two sons, Ishmael and Isaac."

2. *Thine only son,*

"But, Lord, both Ishmael and Isaac are my sons, and each of them is the only son of his mother."

2. *Isaac, whom thou lovest,*

See how definitely God points out to Abraham the son who is to be the means of the great trial of his father's faith: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest,"—

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\* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,223, "Abraham's Trial; a Lesson for Believers."