

STEPS TO CHRIST

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GROWING UP INTO CHRIST

The change of heart by which we become children of God is in the Bible spoken of as birth. Again, it is compared to the germination of the good seed sown by the husbandman. In like manner those who are just converted to Christ are, as "new-born babes," to "grow up" **1 Peter 2:2, Ephesians 4:15**, to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. Or like the good seed sown in the field, they are to grow up and bring forth fruit. Isaiah says that they shall "be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." **Isaiah 61:3**. So from natural life, illustrations are drawn, to help us better to understand the mysterious truths of spiritual life.

Not all the wisdom and skill of man can produce life in the smallest object in nature. It is only through the life which God himself has imparted, that either plant or animal can live. So it is only through the life from God that spiritual life is begotten in the hearts of men. Unless a man is "born from above," **John 3:3**, he cannot become a partaker of the life which Christ came to give.

As with life, so it is with growth. It is God who brings the bud to bloom and the flower to fruit. It is by his power that the seed develops, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." **Mark 4:28**. And the prophet Hosea says of Israel, that "he shall grow as the lily." "They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine." **Hosea 14:5, 7**. And Jesus bids us "consider the lilies, how they grow." **Luke 12:27**. The plants and flowers grow not by their own care or anxiety or effort, but by receiving that which God has furnished to minister to their life. The child cannot, by any anxiety or power of its own, add to its stature. No more can you, by anxiety or effort of yourself, secure spiritual growth. The plant, the child, grows by receiving from its surroundings that which ministers to its life, - air, sunshine, and food. What these gifts of nature are to animal and plant, such is Christ to those who trust in him. He is their "everlasting light," "a sun and a shield." **Isaiah 60:19; Psalm 84:11**. He shall be as "the dew unto Israel." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." **Hosea 14:5; Psalm 72:6**. He is the living water, "the bread of God . . . which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." **John 6:33**.

In the matchless gift of his Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace, as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live, and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.

As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that Heaven's light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed in the likeness of Christ.

Jesus teaches the same thing when he says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . Without me ye can do nothing." **John 15:4, 5**. You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for

growth and fruitfulness. Apart from him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, "Without me ye can do nothing." Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,--all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with him, daily, hourly,--by abiding in him, - that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the author but the finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." **Psalm 16:8.**

Do you ask, "How am I to abide in Christ?" - In the same way as you received him at first. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." "The just shall live by faith." **Colossians 2:6; Hebrews 10:38.** You gave yourself to God, to be his wholly, to serve and obey him, and you took Christ as your Saviour. You could not yourself atone for your sins or change your heart; but having given yourself to God, you believed that he for Christ's sake did all this for you. By *faith* you became Christ's, and by faith you are to grow up in him, - by giving and taking. You are to *give* all, - your heart, your will, your service,--give yourself to him to obey all his requirements; and you must *take* all, - Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper, - to give you power to obey.

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "Take me, O Lord, as wholly thine. I lay all my plans at thy feet. Use me today in thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in thee." This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to him, to be carried out or given up as his providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be moulded more and more after the life of Christ.

A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to his strength, your ignorance to his wisdom, your frailty to his enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell on self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon his love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of his character. Christ in his self-denial, Christ in his humiliation, Christ in his purity and holiness, Christ in his matchless love,--this is the subject for the soul's contemplation. It is by loving him, copying him, depending wholly upon him, that you are to be transformed into his likeness.

Jesus says, "Abide in me." These words convey the idea of rest, stability, confidence. Again he invites, "Come unto me. . . and I will give you rest." **Matthew 11:28.** The words of the Psalmist express the same thought: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." And Isaiah gives the assurance, "In quietness and confidence shall

be your strength." **Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 30:15.** This rest is not found in inactivity: for in the Saviour's invitation the promise of rest is united with the call to labor: "Take my yoke upon you, . . . and ye shall find rest." **Matthew 11:29.** The heart that rests most fully upon Christ will be most earnest and active in labor for him.

When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour, and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections,--to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ, he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center, and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." **Galatians 2:20.** Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to him. If you will leave yourself in his hands, he will bring you off more than conqueror through him that has loved you.

When Christ took human nature upon him, he bound humanity to himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie,--to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and he will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus we are safe. Nothing can pluck us out of his hand. In constantly beholding him, we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." **2 Corinthians 3:18.**

It was thus that the early disciples gained their likeness to the dear Saviour. When those disciples heard the words of Jesus, they felt their need of him. They sought, they found, they followed him. They were with him in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field. They were with him as pupils with a teacher, daily receiving from his lips lessons of holy truth. They looked to him, as servants to their master, to learn their duty. Those disciples were men "subject to like passions as we are." **James 5:17.** They had the same battle with sin to fight. They needed the same grace, in order to live a holy life.

Even John, the beloved disciple, the one who most fully reflected the likeness of the Saviour, did not naturally possess that loveliness of character. He was not only self-assertive and ambitious for honor, but impetuous and resentful under injuries. But as the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, he saw his own deficiency, and was humbled by the knowledge. The strength and patience, the power and tenderness, the majesty and meekness, that he beheld in the daily life of the Son of God, filled his soul with admiration and love. Day by day his heart was drawn out toward Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master. His resentful, ambitious temper

was yielded to the moulding power of Christ. The regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit renewed his heart. The power of the love of Christ wrought a transformation of character. This is the sure result of union with Jesus. When Christ abides in the heart, the whole nature is transformed. Christ's spirit, his love, softens the heart, subdues the soul, and raises the thoughts and desires toward God and heaven.

When Christ ascended to heaven, the sense of his presence was still with his followers. It was a personal presence, full of love and light. Jesus, the Saviour, who had walked and talked and prayed with them, who had spoken hope and comfort to their hearts had, while the message of peace was still upon his lips, been taken up from them into heaven, and the tones of his voice had come back to them, as the cloud of angels received him, - "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." **Matthew 28:20**. He had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. They knew that he was before the throne of God, their friend and Saviour still; that his sympathies were unchanged; that he was still identified with suffering humanity. He was presenting before God the merits of his own precious blood, showing his wounded hands and feet, in remembrance of the price he had paid for his redeemed. They knew that he had ascended to heaven to prepare places for them, and that he would come again, and take them to himself.

As they met together, after the ascension, they were eager to present their requests to the Father in the name of Jesus. In solemn awe they bowed in prayer, repeating the assurance, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." **John 16:23, 24**. They extended the hand of faith higher and higher, with the mighty argument, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." **Romans 8:34**. And Pentecost brought them the presence of the Comforter, of whom Christ had said, he "shall be in you." And he had further said, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you." **John 14:17; 16:7**. Henceforth through the Spirit, Christ was to abide continually in the hearts of his children. Their union with him was closer than when he was personally with them. The light, and love and power of the indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, "marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." **Acts 4:13**.

All that Christ was to the first disciples, he desires to be to his children today; for in that last prayer, with the little band of disciples gathered about him, he said, "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." **John 17:20**.

Jesus prayed for us, and he asked that we might be one with him, even as he is one with the Father. What a union is this! The Saviour had said of himself, "The Son can do nothing of himself;" "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." **John 5:19; 14:10**. Then if Christ is dwelling in our hearts, he will work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." **Philippians 2:13**. We shall work as he worked; we shall manifest the same spirit. And thus, loving him and abiding in him, we shall "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." **Ephesians 4:15**.