



February 28, 2010

*How We Grow*

Sometimes in talking to folks they relate their experience of becoming more “spiritual”. The course of the conversation usually covers the various occurrences in their lives of things that they know they could not have done or would not have happened without the help of the Lord. Frequently the term miracle is used to describe an event or process. This affirmation is proof to them that the Lord is with them and they are on the right course with their lives. Others offer proof of their heightened spiritual interest and achievement by relating the activities, boards or other functions that they are part of with their church. There are some variations of these but they have one thing in common. All of them measure spiritual growth based on their subjective experience. Rarely do I hear someone talk about how they have grown because of their study of God’s word. The raw material of faith itself, scripture, is absent or is mentioned only briefly. When we think of what it means to grow spiritually we must be aware that doing so involves knowing what that meant in the first place. Many individuals like to define what being spiritual or religious means to them, but what does it mean to God? Paul emphasized the need to be familiar with God’s word in order to understand it. Paul told the Ephesians, “**Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ**” (Eph 3.4). The word mystery in the New Testament refers to the revelation of God’s will, not something that remained in the shadows. Paul clearly indicates here that true knowledge and understanding begin with reading God’s word. There is more to it however as we search the scriptures. Paul told timothy, “**Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**” (2 Tim 2.15). In this passage, one that is very familiar to students of the Bible, the exhortation goes beyond reading. There are many who read the scriptures but never seem to understand what they are saying. We must understand the message of the scriptures in light of what the entire book is saying and hearing the things that God wants us to hear. Paul refers to that “rightly dividing” the word of truth. Understanding how it is put together and how things are stated. These are crucial elements in gaining true spirituality. Reading God’s word and coming to a critical understanding of it, helps us to understand what Paul meant when he told the Philippians, “**...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**” (Phil 2.12). This does not license one to come up with our own ideas of what we can teach and practice. Paul is telling the Christians there that they needed to come to an understanding and find a way to overcome whatever stood in their way in terms of reaching the goal of Heaven. There is an added dimension that God’s word provides us with as we continue on the journey to being truly spiritual and that is putting these things into action. We will not be graded for simply knowing that answers to questions. Life itself is a test and we must face it everyday with the attitude that we are going to find a way to put God’s word to work in our lives finding ways to better serve him. James states, “**But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**” (Jas 1.22). Such actions will cause us to change, conforming to the word of the Lord and as we do so that change becomes more apparent to others who can see what we do. Paul told Timothy, “**Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.**” (1 Tim 4.15). The final result of these activities is that we will draw closer to God. James states, “**Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.**” (James 4.8). Knowing what God’s will is, through reading and studying it, putting it into action in ways that are pleasing to the Lord are elements of a spiritual life. God is the one who created us, gave us souls, revealed himself to us, and only he can define what is spiritual.

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