

# *Spiritual* **GROWTH**



BY CYPRIAN ANTWI AWUAH

## **Spiritual Growth**

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### **Dedication**

This book is dedicated with love and thanks to my mother, Janet Akraasi, whose love for me has always been unconditional. Her example helps me to understand our heavenly Father's love for us.

## Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	6
Growth .....	6
CHAPTER 1.....	9
Eternal Security .....	9
Attack on Eternal Security is an Attack on Divine knowledge .....	11
God Wants Christians To Know That They Are Eternally Saved .....	13
CHAPTER 2.....	15
Spiritual Growth .....	15
Is Spiritual Growth Really A Biblical Subject? .....	16
CHAPTER 3.....	24
Scriptures that Confirm the Doctrine of Spiritual Growth .....	24
Chapter 4.....	39
Suffering or Trials are used by God to facilitate spiritual growth. ....	39
CHAPTER 5.....	47
Resources for the Spiritual Growth .....	47
Bible Teaching .....	51
The Holy Spirit .....	53

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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Prayer ..... 54

The local church ..... 55

CHAPTER 6..... 61

    Hindrances to Spiritual Growth..... 61

CHAPTER 7..... 75

    Why The Need To Remain Faithful? ..... 75

## INTRODUCTION

# Growth

The term “growth” is something that is remarkably familiar to the human race. We see plants grow out of seeds; we see animals grow in stages with different sizes; we see humans grow from babyhood to childhood, from childhood to adolescence, then to physical maturity. We see all kinds of physical changes in animals and human beings as we look at each different stage of growth. There are also other areas that we normally see growth. For example, we see growth in businesses. People start small businesses, and they start growing. Sometimes we measure the growth in business in terms of increase in the number of customers, employees, or certain material resources that the company has acquired over the years. So, the idea of growth is something that we all are familiar with.

God is not silent regarding the subject of spiritual growth. The Bible has consistently used phrases or statements that can only be fitting in growth. The spiritual life starts with the salvation of the soul from the penalty of sin, which is spiritual death (separation of man from God in terms of relationship) and his ultimate separation from God (his permanent stay in the lake of fire). The idea of spiritual death is that one separation (death) leads to another separation (death-

final separation from God). In other words, all those who are spiritually dead now and continue to remain in that condition will be assigned to the lake of fire. The only way to escape the future lake of fire is to be delivered from the present spiritual death condition, which humanity was born into.

Sin is what made all of us spiritually dead. Adam first sinned, and that sin affected every human being at birth, except for our Lord Jesus Christ because of the intervention of God the Holy Spirit during Mary's conception. All other members of humanity are sinners. In fact, every man proves that he/she is a sinner by manifesting the consequences of sin. For example, stealing, telling of lies by children, etc. Therefore, only the spiritual birth can make you a child of God. Because you are God's child, you automatically inherit certain things of your father. For example, you are guaranteed the same place that your father comes from. This explains why all Christians come from Heaven. We come from Heaven, not because we were directly born there, but because the person who gave birth to us is from there. Now, after you have been saved and become a child of God, certain things are now expected of you, including your spiritual growth. The expectation is not so that you can go to heaven, that is already guaranteed; but the expectation is because of the tremendous blessings you received at the moment of your salvation. To whom much is given, much (responsibility and accountability) is expected. The purpose for those blessings is to help the believer

grow spiritually to maturity so that he could glorify God. This is where the issue of spiritual growth comes into play as far as the Christian life is concerned. This book is carefully written to bring to the attention of all Christians the biblical doctrine or teaching called, “spiritual growth”. In this book the reader is going to learn about the resources for spiritual growth, hindrances to spiritual growth, consequences of not using the resources, and other things related to spiritual growth.



CHAPTER 1

# Eternal Security

Understanding eternal security is necessary to understanding spiritual growth. Just as no building can have pillars and walls without first having a foundation, so spiritual growth cannot be understood without understanding eternal security of the believer. Eternal security, which is another way of saying your salvation is secured forever, is the ground or foundation for understanding spiritual growth. Every foundation is always the starting point of something that comes as secondary to it. Eternal security is reasoned not only from the standpoint of God's complete protection in our life, but also from the standpoint of birth. Once any person is physically given birth to cannot be unborn. Has anyone in the world seen a person who was born, and at some point, in time was unborn by gradually reversing the process from babyhood to foetus, and from foetus to embryo till there was no conception? If that is not possible, then the same understanding is to be applied when it comes to being born by God. To be birthed by God is a one-shot act of God, an act which never reverses. After birth, growth is what comes next in the plan of God.

Why is it so important that a child of God should believe in eternal security? Because it is a foundation doctrine that provides assurance of security and peace

to the soul of the one who believes it. If a Christian does not know or believe it, it will affect him or her in so many ways. If you do not have a settled peace of mind concerning where you are going to spend eternity, then it means you do not have assurance of security. In other words, you doubt that you are secured in the hands of God. If you are not hundred percent sure that if you were to die today you would go to heaven, then it means your mind is already centered on works. There is no middle ground; either a believer has an assurance of eternal security or he does not have it. And if he does not have assurance of eternal security, then it means he is already concentrating on his own works. Either a person has his mind fixed on what Christ did on the cross for him or he has his mind fixed on something that he can do so that he will be accepted by God. Any Christian who thinks this way cannot grow spiritually. This is because, instead of him to rely on divine provisions like the teachings in the Bible and the Holy Spirit for his growth, he will leave the provisions and rely on his own works, thinking that it is his own good works that will commend him to God. And since deep down in his soul, he knows that his good works are not enough for God to accept him, he never comes to the assurance that he is completely saved. Such a Christian cannot have a settled peace. He cannot experience the joy that only comes by knowing that heaven is the home of those who have put their trust in Christ. Instead, he will live in fear and doubt until one day he finds assurance of security through the knowledge of the

fact that only Christ's finished work on the cross can commend a person to God. But once he gets this breakthrough, he is on his way to understanding what spiritual growth is about. This is because, he has finally experienced the knowledge of eternal security, and he is now confident that he is fully accepted by God, and that it is not about his works.

### **Attack on Eternal Security is an Attack on Divine knowledge**

When a believer rejects or speaks against the teaching of the eternal security of the believer, he or she is ignorantly attacking God's word. Eternal salvation, which gives us eternal security, is not a man-made doctrine. The doctrine is clearly taught in the scripture, both explicitly and implicitly. To attack Eternal security is to promote ignorance of many other doctrines in the Bible. Like the human body, which is a single body but with many related, yet different body parts, the same way the Bible is one but with many different, yet related doctrines, whereby one doctrine may be closely related to the other. This means that believing in one doctrine moves the Bible student one step further to understand the other related doctrines. But if doctrine "A" is rejected, then it becomes difficult for doctrine "B" to be understood. No one can properly understand and pursue spiritual growth as a goal in life if he does not believe in Eternal security.

The underlying reason behind those who attack doctrine of eternal security is that the doctrine will

make people live their lives anyhow. So, in effect, what those who oppose the doctrine are saying is that knowledge of eternal security causes people to sin, and that if believers do not know it (become ignorant of it) or does not believe it, they will live their lives like Christ.

That line of argument is just like saying, “let us not tell a person that he is a prince, or he belongs to the royal family, because if he gets to know that he will live misguided life in the community. But wait a minute! Will keeping a person from knowing his identity change his identity? Even if he lives his life not as a royalty, (which of course is wrong), will that change who he is? Is he not supposed to know or be assured that he is a prince and that he should check how he lives his life? Is that not better than trying to tell the person that he is not a prince?

Eternal security is a claim by Scripture; men who have come to know it only teach it. Even Jesus taught it in the following passages: John 3:16, 5:24, 6:37-40, 10:27-29; Apostle Paul taught in the following passages: Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 2:8, 4:30; Phil.1:6; 2 Corinthians 1:22; John taught it: 1 John 5:13; Jude taught it: Jude 1:24; Writer of the Hebrews also taught it: Hebrews 7:25. Therefore, the burden of proof lies on the person who alleges or claim that doctrine of eternal security is unscriptural.

**God Wants Christians To Know That They Are  
Eternally Saved**

The common answer that has come from many Christians when asked whether they will go to heaven if they die is, “I do not know, only God knows”. By giving this response, they do not mean that they have not believed in Jesus Christ; rather, what they mean is that they are not sure if that trust or faith, which they put in Christ some time ago, still makes them qualified to be accepted by God. But the question that needs to be asked is: does God want to keep salvation secret, or Does He want those who have it to know? Well, the plain reading of some texts of Scripture clearly shows that God wants salvation to be known to those who have it.

***These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. - 1 John 5:13. (Underlined word mine for emphasis)***

This text is informing us that God wants Christians to “know” that they have eternal life. And once a person has eternal life, it means his eternal destiny is secured. This is because eternal life does not perish, and that is why it is called “eternal life”. So, eternal security exists because we possess a life that cannot perish, a life that is eternal. All that we need to do is to accept or believe in what the Scripture is saying. If we take our eyes from what God has said in His word and concentrate on our feelings, we will not have that confidence or assurance that we are eternally secured or saved.

There is power in His word, and it is that power that will give you that confidence. But before that happens, you need to believe it first.

Now you say, “How do I get this eternal life that you are talking about, this life that never perishes, how do I get it?” well, thankfully, the answer is right in the Bible.

**And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the Life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. -1 John 5:11-12**

Again, you say, “Now that I know that eternal life is in His Son, how do I personally get that life?” The answer of the Scripture has not changed at all. It is still the same old answer, which is: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” - John 6:67.** Believes what? Answer: that Jesus died personally for your sins, was buried, and resurrected on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), or that He is the Jewish messiah who came to save the world from sins, including yours too. This is the simple content of the gospel message that everyone needs to believe to have both Jesus and eternal life, since eternal life is in Him alone.

CHAPTER 2

## Spiritual Growth

There are a lot of biblical doctrines/teachings that have never found themselves on many pulpits as far as God's command of, "shepherd my sheep" (Matthew 21:16, Acts 20:28) is concerned. The Bible is broad, like the human body, it has many parts. Each part must be recognized and placed properly in its rightful place. Spiritual growth is one of the many doctrines that are not recognized by many. Any miss in a single doctrine in the life of any Christian will go a long way to affect the believer negatively in his understanding of other doctrines. When one doctrine is missed, it will hinder the believer from understanding other doctrines that are related to the missing doctrines. For example, if teaching on spiritual growth is missing, then teachings on Christian reward will also be missing. And once teachings on Christian rewards get missing; it means the teachings on the Judgment seat of Christ will also be missing. This is because those doctrines are related with one another in a certain way. Rejection of one will lead to the rejection of others. This is how God has made His word. You cannot ignore, reject, or miss one doctrine in the Bible without paying for it someday. The payment would be that you will be misinterpreting a passage. The questions that need to be answered at this point are these:

1. Is spiritual growth a biblical subject?
2. Where in the Bible can this teaching be found?
3. Is spiritual growth not the same as eternal salvation?
4. Why is it necessary for Christians to grow?
5. Are there consequences for not knowing that there is such a teaching called spiritual growth?

The rest of this book will attempt to answer those questions alongside other teachings on growth.

### **Is Spiritual Growth Really A Biblical Subject?**

Repeatedly, the subject of spiritual growth has been taught throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, in different verses, chapters, and books. Its emphasis in the Bible cannot be ignored by any objective Christian or Bible student. God's goal for saving unbelievers for believing in Christ's death for their sins is not just to make them His children. His goal is to bring them to spiritual maturity in order to enable them to become more like Christ in Character. Many Christians doubt their salvation in Christ or lack assurance of their salvation because of the absence of teachings on spiritual growth in their Christian experience. Because they lack assurance or confidence about their salvation, they get distracted by the idea of how they can go to heaven. As a result, they end up not ever coming to the true knowledge of the biblical subject of spiritual growth. The very teachings that would give them assurance of their salvation or



security have been missing in their spiritual menu. Instead of knowing that heaven is a place of those who are born by God through faith in Christ, they end up thinking that they must do something good to become citizens of heaven.

It is true that as Christians we need to do good works. In fact, we are saved or created in Christ Jesus to do good works according to the scriptures (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14). But the point is that good works are expected from us (Christians) because we are saved and belong to a new family. Good works are not expected from us for us to be saved eternally or go to heaven. The phrase **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”** (Ephesians 2:10) logically presents an order whereby “creation” or “being born” comes first before good works follow as a purpose. A critical look at the phrase will show the logical student to see that “good works” is an ending point of creation in Christ, not a starting point. Analyzing the first-person plural pronoun, “we” in the phrase shows that the “we” speaks of or describes a salvation or creation that has already taken place in past tense. The next thing we see in the sentence is that the creation (which has already taken place) is **for** good works. The “for” in the same sentence emphasizes a purpose or direction. There cannot be a purpose when something does not already exist. In this case salvation or creation in Christ already exist, waiting for those who have already benefited from that creation to walk in a good works that are created

for them. We should not fail to rightly divide this distinct truth, for the original writer did not fail to distinguish them in normal plain language. It might not be explicit distinction, but a distinction is implied.

We need to understand that an unbeliever is not expected to produce good works to be saved. This is because no one can get to heaven by his own good works. The only way to be part of the heavenly family is to believe in Jesus Christ for dying for their sins. That is the only thing that is expected from the unbeliever. After that important decision in this life has taken place, he no longer remains an unbeliever; he is now born again or has become part of the “we” or those created in Christ Jesus of Ephesians 2:10. Since he is now saved and belongs to God’s family, he is bound by the family rules, new rules that he will not know unless he learns them. He is expected to live his life according to the standard or new rules of that family. This standard, which comes in a form of commands are to challenge him to use the resources available in His new family. And please remember that the family comes from heaven, even though we are presently in the world (John 17:14-16; 1 John 5:19).

God does not just save us and keep us here on earth without any purpose. If He saved us just to go to heaven, then why did not He take us to heaven immediately after we got saved? The very fact that He keeps us here and has given us many resources, which were attached to our salvation means that there is a

special goal that He has in mind. And the goal is simply about how we can grow spiritually to maturity in order to manifest Christ in character wise. The goal is never about how to get to heaven. Any Christian who misses this point can never consciously think about his or her spiritual growth. Instead, they will consciously be thinking about how they can go to heaven by their own good works or behavior. They reject the grace of Jesus' work on the cross and look up to themselves. Their works become their standard instead of Christ's death on the cross. And since they cannot be sure of how much of good works can save them or maintain their salvation, they end up not being assured of their salvation. What a sad experience that is!

The Bible is likened to the human body. It is described in terms of completeness or wholeness. Just as the human body is whole or complete, so the Bible is complete. When Apostle Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, having stayed three and half years at Ephesus, He called the Ephesian Pastors to come to him at Miletus. There, the apostle made this statement below to those pastors when he was encouraging them.

***For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" Acts 20:27***

This statement implies that Paul rightly divided or taught the whole counsel or purpose of God in parts. Therefore, all the parts need to be taught just as Paul did for those Pastors. Not only did Apostle Paul recognize the wholeness of God's word, but Apostle

Peter also used a language which logically implies that God's word is in wholeness, but also in parts.

***Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence 2 Peter 1:3***

God has given us everything that we need to understand the spiritual life. The "everything" being referred to in the verse is simply about all the different doctrines in the Bible which Christians need to know and apply to their spiritual life. Unfortunately, many Christians do not even know that the Bible (which is whole), is also in parts, and therefore, each part must be properly understood before it can be applied.

Every bit of doctrine given under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit is what Paul calls, "the whole purpose of God". Being ignorant of any single doctrine in the Bible can lead the Christian into a state of confusion. For example, if a Christian does not know that the Holy Spirit has sealed him for the day of the redemption of his physical body (Ephesians 4:30; 1:13), then he/she might think that he/she can lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit anytime there is any failure on his/her part toward the Lord's instructions. Whilst Christians can lose the filling of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for a Christian to lose the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit is the permanent stay of the

Holy Spirit in the believer while the filling of the Holy Spirit is the influence of the Spirit in the believer.

Everyone becomes spiritually alive at the point that they believe in Jesus Christ for dying for their sins. But the truth is that they are born in ignorance. Our spiritual birth does not come with any spiritual knowledge, except the knowledge of the gospel through which we got saved. Despite being saved, we can still lose the assurance in the gospel message if we are not properly taught about the Christian way of life. “Losing our assurance” does not mean loss of our justification before God; it simply means that we will start doubting our salvation which the gospel message promised and as a result experience stunted growth in our spiritual advance.

If there is growth, then there must be a starting point from which growth can take place. The starting point is our spiritual birth. God uses certain things in the physical life with which we are familiar as an analogy to communicate some spiritual truth. He uses man’s relevant previous knowledge and teaches from the known (familiar things) to the unknown (Bible teachings we are ignorant of and yet to know). For example, to explain this spiritual birth to Nichodemus, Jesus used a language that Nichodemus was familiar with.

***“.....Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” John 3:3***

Nichodemus, immediately interpreted Jesus words according to his frame of reference. Jesus used a language that was related to physical birth to communicate about the spiritual birth. The spiritual birth makes every Christian a new creature. Just as there is life at physical birth, so God gives life at spiritual birth. This life is what Jesus calls, “eternal life”.

***And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28.***

The moment an unbeliever believes that Jesus Christ died for his sins, Christ immediately gives the person eternal life, and never will that person perish in the lake of fire. There is spiritual birth and there is life that follows it, just as there is physical birth and life that follows it. In other words, there is birth, and there is growth (life) that follows it.

When a person is born physically, he remains dependent on certain physical/material resources to keep him living and growing. He feeds on breast milk for some months or years. As he keeps growing, he begins to feed on soft food which is quite heavier than the breast milk. Then, from soft food, he starts eating solid food as he grows up. From solid food, he begins to eat hard food like bones. All those foods provide nourishment and strength to his body for continuous growth to manifest those potentials which are in that life. The foods are not life in themselves; they only

nourish, keep, or maintain the life that is in the person, which was given at birth. This physical life is then manifested in so many ways, such as walking, dancing, weeding, exercising, eating, studying, etc. All those human activities are manifestations of life. A dead person is not able to engage in any human activity. This is because there is no life in him. A sick person, on the other hand, may be restricted on living out the life in him because of his health challenges.

There are languages, terms, or expressions that indicate that there is potential growth and manifestations from the eternal life that one receives. This is because eternal life is a life manifesting gift. Since every growth that occurs in any organism is dependent on some resources, so eternal life, though not an organism, cannot grow or manifest without the right resources which God has designed for it.

## CHAPTER 3

# Scriptures that Confirm the Doctrine of Spiritual Growth

There is a maxim in Latin which says, “ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat”, which literally means: a burden of proof is on the one who declares, not on the one who denies. That is why in the court of competent jurisdiction, a man is innocent unless proven guilty. In other words, evidence is what wins a case in court, not mere allegation. It is the position of the author that the Bible clearly teaches about spiritual growth; and that salvation or Justification and spiritual growth are two different things. The latter can exist because the former already exist. Therefore, the burden of proof lies on the objector, who declares that there is no such thing as spiritual growth. The reader of this book, after carefully going through it, is free to act as a Judge, whether the Bible teaches about a spiritual process called, “Spiritual growth”.

Changing one’s position from seeing “justification and spiritual growth” as unseparate thing to “justification and spiritual growth” as being two separate things will not make such a Christian a loser in his theology. Understanding the spiritual life is not a competition; neither is it about following a particular system of theology blindly, even when all the facts are clearly laid



before you. God can use anybody that He desires to bring a Particular truth to you; a truth or doctrine that you probably may not have taken notice of throughout your Christian life. But that does not make you an inferior Bible student, Pastor, theologian, or a Christian; it just means that you recognize that iron sharpens iron. Of cause, nobody is born as spiritual giant in knowledge; the only difference is: some commit to diligent studies, while others do not. Therefore, iron sharpens iron.

Every believer has once followed or believed in some form of wrong views from men that they admired concerning certain teachings they thought were from the scriptures. We all have changed in our theology from our baby days and our teen days, spiritually speaking. We have got certain things wrong before, and that is okay, we are not perfect beings; even God knows that, and that is why scripture is for correction, too. However, when the facts are presented, and are so clear about what the Bible teaches, we do not have to reject the facts just because we want to defend our theology or some denominational beliefs. We should remember that some denominational beliefs were put together by men. Some of those men may not have understood certain things clearly at the time they put those beliefs together. Why must somebody who is dead and gone still control our minds with certain erroneous teachings? It would surprise some to know that if majority of those men whose theology most believers follow today were to be alive, most of them

would subject themselves for correction and change their views as result of following the right interpretation of scripture. If we remember that we are going to give account on our teachings and the things/doctrines that we do believe, we will have a reason to be concerned about our teachings and beliefs.

**Only the saved ones (Christians) are asked to grow.**

***“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” - 2 Peter 3:18***

To which group of people did Apostle Peter write this letter? Of course, he wrote to Christians. Our interest should not be whether they were Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians; our interest should be whether they had believed in Christ or not? From Apostle Peter’s praise in 1 Peter 1:3, we know that he wrote to Christians. This is because he identified himself using the first-person plural pronoun in the objective case, “us”.

The command, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” cannot be an evangelistic message. Nobody begins growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord without first entering right relationship with God by experiencing the new birth. How can an unbeliever grow in grace? It is

impossible. You can only grow in something you already have. A plant can grow on soil because it is already on the soil; it cannot grow in the air before coming down to the soil. We grow physically with the food that we have in our bodies; not food that we have not eaten yet. A businessman can only grow his business with the resources that he has, not what he does not have. Unless an unbeliever first “eats Christ”, or “drinks Christ” (believe in Christ), he cannot have Christ in him. It is only when Christ has come into him that he can have Him as a resource to grow. His coming into the unbeliever brings rich resources; we can also call those resources “grace”. It is those resources that Apostle Peter, by application, is telling us to grow in. Just as Christians were saved by grace, the same way, they must grow in grace. One grace leads to the other. The grace that saves an unbeliever from spiritual death brings another grace so that he can grow spiritually. God intends that all those who are saved grow spiritually to maturity that is why He gives them resources to grow. Apostle Peter is not telling unbelievers how to be saved; he is telling Christians to grow in the grace which they received when they believed in Jesus Christ or became saved.

The command to grow spiritually indicates that believing in Jesus Christ as someone who died for your sins and growing spiritually are not the same; neither do the two happen at the same moment. The latter is depended on the former. If growth is tied with justification/salvation as one thing, Peter would not

have written that Christians should still grow in something they had already attained. The verse clearly shows that spiritual growth is secondary to salvation (Justification).

**Spiritual growth goes beyond foundational teachings**

***Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God  
Hebrew 6:1***

In the verse above, the author identified himself with his audience as a group who were already saved and needed to press on to maturity. This verse is another verse that clearly teaches spiritual growth as a process that is secondary to one's salvation. So, in fact, an unbeliever cannot press on to maturity. He cannot even start the spiritual life, let alone to press on to spiritual maturity. Before any person can embark on the spiritual journey of growth or towards maturity, that person must first have access to certain spiritual resources. And since all the spiritual growth resources are hidden in Christ, that person needs to believe in Jesus' death and resurrection before having access to those resources.

The background of Hebrews is that some of the Jews who believed in Jesus Christ in the first century church had started going back to the Jewish temple again as if the temple had not finished its purpose even though

God demonstrated to them that He was done with the Temple's purpose by the tearing of the temple's veil into two (Matthew 27:50-51). The veil, which prevented every individual Jew from having access to the holy of holies, except the high priest, was torn into two at the hour of Christ's death, indicating that Christ's death on the cross removed the barrier. Today, all Christians have access to God because of Christ death on the cross. We do not need to travel to Jerusalem or visit any Bishop, Papa or Pope before we can worship or pray to God.

This basic truth had been taught to the Jewish Christians, yet some of them, in order to avoid rejection or persecution from their families or religious authorities had returned to the temple to continue with the Jewish way of worship. The author of Hebrews, who also was a Jew, was warning his brethren to stop those practices. The Christian faith is such that, it comes with resources that are not physical. Therefore, any Christian, whether with a Jewish background or Gentile background who holds to some form of ritual as a means of salvation loses the spiritual growth consciousness. This is because if you are not even sure of your salvation in the first place, how could you even think in terms of growth? This was the reason why the writer of Hebrews was asking them to press on. "Press on" can simply be understood as, "persevere". But they were to press on to what? You see, it was maturity that they were to press on to, but not their eternal salvation. It takes a lot of

perseverance to pursue one's spiritual growth. The unbeliever cannot press on to get eternal life; he can only press on to maturity or discipleship after he has been saved or received eternal life. "Press on" is a special command to those who are already saved (Christians).

Our gospel is not a gospel of "press on" to be saved; it is a gospel of "believe in Jesus death, burial, and resurrection". Once that is done, you are to press on believing all the Christian promises in the Bible, the warnings, as well as enduring all sufferings that the Christian faith attracts. Jesus promised that if they persecuted Him, they would persecute us, too (John 15:20). This is the aspect that makes the Christian race difficult. But we do not have to confuse salvation or justification, which is not a race, but a gift received instantly at the very moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, with spiritual growth, which is a race, walk, war, etc., and attainable only when a Christian perseveres or presses on by depending on the divine resources during difficult times.

Please, notice that the Hebrew writer did not say his audience was to press on so that they would make it to heaven; that is not found in the text. They were to press on "to" or "towards" maturity. "To" or "Towards" is a preposition that expresses [motion in a particular direction or location. And the direction is clearly stated in the same verse. They were to press on to the direction of maturity, not heaven. Why did not

he say, “Press on to heaven” even though we know he wanted them to go to heaven? Of course, going to heaven did not depend on any of the things that the writer had written in his letter. This is because the people were saved a long time before they got the letter. But one thing was certain, their maturity in time and their future rewards in heaven depended on how obedient they became to this letter. The writer clearly understood that God’s plan and goal for the believer in this world is never about how he/she would get to heaven, but how they would reach maturity. Until we wake up in our thinking to recognize this important goal of God, we can never understand Christianity; neither can we be able to help others to understand it too.

***<sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspect into Him who is the head, even***

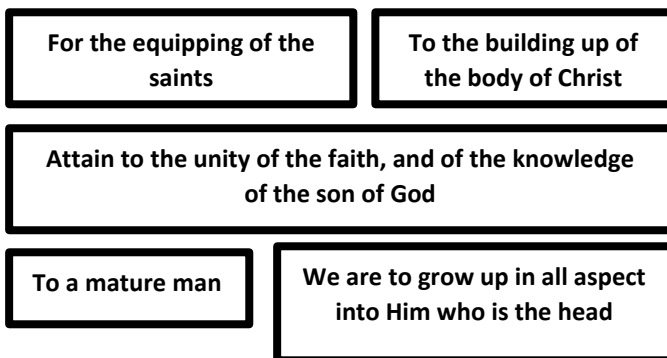
***Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***  
***Ephesians 4:11-16***

The phrases that I have underlined will help us to ask a quite simple question, “What was Apostle Paul trying to communicate to the Ephesian Christians?” Either Paul was teaching them how they could finally get to heaven or he was teaching them how they could reach spiritual maturity. The Ephesian believers had been saved long time before they received this letter. In fact, Paul spent three years in Ephesus, teaching the Christians the whole counsel of God after they had believed that Jesus Christ personally died for their sins (Acts 20:31). Writing from a Roman prison, Paul explained the purpose for which Christ gave spiritual gifts for the entire body of Christ. In the context of the passage, Paul is teaching that the gifts are for the entire body of Christ, not just some parts/members of the body (local church/denominations). This is a particularly important point since many of us tend to think that every local church must have all the spiritual gifts for the body of Christ. When you do that, you are going to get confused sooner or later. Because, if you are a five-member church: yourself, wife, two children, and a friend, you are going to start getting confused as to who is the prophet, and who is the Apostle, etc.? We must understand that the entire body of the church does not meet in one geographical location



throughout the church age. We have had about 20 generations since the church started. The first century Christians through the 19 century is dead and gone. The earlier centuries benefited from all the oral teachings of the apostles and the prophets, their inspired oral teachings were later put down into writings, which we have as the New Testament books today. We must remember that there was no New Testament Bible when the church started. Since Christians are not under the Law concerning how they should live their lives till the rapture, it was reasonable that God would give a new and fresh revelation that would serve as governing principles for this new specie called, "church". How did we get this new revelation for the church? It came from certain men appointed by Jesus Christ himself, called apostles. The same apostles were also prophets, receiving new teachings that did not exist in the Old Testament. They were to go round and teach the churches those revelations. Pastors in those days were to pay attention to the apostles' teachings so that they would teach the exact things that the apostles taught. Example, Paul asked Timothy explicitly to teach other faithful believers the same doctrines that he (Timothy) had heard Paul teach (2 Timothy 2:2). Today, we are all bound to teach what the Apostles taught and wrote down by means of their spiritual gifts. Why? This is because, our passage is telling us that, the gifts were given to build the entire body of Christ, whether in Paul's day or today. Today, you and I are still benefitting from the spiritual gifts of all the Apostles through their writings in the New

Testament. This is the only way that the body concept of the church makes sense. Pastors, evangelists, and all the rest of the communication/speaking gifts (1 Peter 4:11) are to teach what Timothy or Titus would teach. They taught what Paul had taught them. We have all those teachings in the New Testament Bible today.



**Points to learn:**

1. The phrase, “for the equipping of the saints” implies that one has to be saint first before he can be equipped. Paul’s interest is not about how they would go to heaven or become saints (because it was already guaranteed), but how they would be equipped in knowledge (not guaranteed, but it is a potential), depending on one’s attitude towards God’s Word.
2. “To the building up of the body of Christ”. Building of something requires time and willingness. Nobody builds anything at once.

Gifted men are given to build the body, both individually and collectively. The Apostles, who were also the prophets for receiving and teaching the New Testament's rule of life, became the foundation for every Christian (Ephesians 2:20). Without them, we would not know anything about the Christian faith/teachings.

3. "Attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God". Faith can mean different things in different context in the Bible. Here, it is not about the faith that the unbeliever needs to exercise towards Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Neither is it about the moment-by-moment application of God's word because we believe them; nor is it about the gift of faith, which God gave to some believers (Acts 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:9) as spiritual gift for the purpose of doing miracles, signs, and wonders. In this context, "the faith" is about the whole Christian beliefs/teachings. The Christian teachings become our beliefs/faith. In other words, it is "that thing" taught in the Bible, which we (Christians) believe. For example, we believe that the Holy Spirit indwells us; we believe that there is a sinful nature in us; we believe that Jesus Christ is coming again; we believe that suffering is sometimes used by God to bring a Christian to maturity; we believe that all works of every

Christian will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ after the rapture; we believe that we have to love our enemies; we believe that faithful Christians in this age will be rewarded whilst unfaithful Christians will lose their rewards; we believe that all unbelievers will be judged at the end of Christ's millennial reign; we believe that Christians are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and also can lose the filling or influence of the Holy Spirit; we believe that each Christian has been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and he cannot lose that sealing, since the sealing is not temporal, but permanent. These and many more Christian teachings are what God expect us to know. Without knowing them, it will be difficult to understand exactly why God is keeping us here and what he is doing in our lives. Only through each of those Christian teachings can a Christian gain the understanding, thereby reaching the maturity that Christ expects. All the teachings are formed like a body or unit. That is why it is called, "the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13) or "the faith" (Jude 3). Each part needs to be properly understood so that such part can do what it was assigned to do in our Christian walk. There is no way that we can become like Christ in Character unless we come to the true knowledge of Him. And we cannot come to the true knowledge of Him if some of the doctrines/teachings are lacking in our minds.

Remember it is called, “the faith”, not “some faith”. Each single faith or teaching must be congruous with the other faith; and if single faith is not able to fix itself logically in the entire body of faith, then it means wrong interpretation of a particular faith has occurred somewhere.

4. “To a mature man”. This cannot be limited to the maturity of the entire universal church, which can only happen at the rapture of the church, but it has an application to each individual Christian. God expects each Christian to mature. Now, if there is maturity, then it is reasonable to accept that, spiritual growth, being a process, must precede a particular level of maturity. Maturity cannot just happen without any process working in that direction. This again, and logically, confirms that there is a biblical teaching about the Christian spiritual growth.
5. “We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head”. Again, in verse 15, the word, “grow” has popped up. Repetition is particularly important in communication, be it Bible teaching, or any subject. It helps a particular thought of God to sink into our minds well. God has used different Apostles to emphasize an especially important biblical subject, called, “spiritual growth”. The subject

is easily identified by a verb like, “grow”, or a noun like, “mature” or “perfect”. Any time you see a command to a believer to grow, or to be mature, or to become perfect, your mind should go to the biblical doctrine of spiritual growth. Since the context of Ephesians 4:9-16 is dealing with communication gifts for the purpose of building the whole body, it is reasonable to believe that the phrase, “grow up in all *aspects* into Him”, refers to the whole Christian faith. Even though, the translators inserted, “aspect”, it still makes sense since the “all” can best refer to all the Christian teachings, through which Christians can be properly built into Christ’s Character. Again, our passage has shown us that, God’s goal, or purpose of keeping us here as Christians, and even giving the entire church spiritual gifts, is for us to grow into maturity. Nothing is stated in the passage about how Christians can go to heaven.

## Chapter 4

# Suffering or Trials are used by God to facilitate spiritual growth.

*Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup>knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup>And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4.*

Here is another place in the Bible that spiritual growth is implied. The book of James is very practical book. Here, James is going to explain how suffering plays a role in spiritual growth or maturity. Apostle James was not trying to pass on an evangelistic message on how his audience could be justified or receive God's righteousness so that they would end up in heaven. His message is about how Christians are to live their lives every day in this world by knowing that suffering is one of the resources that facilitate spiritual growth or maturity.

Since Satan is still the ruler of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and continues to govern it by means of his cosmic policy, there are going to be problems in the world. That means he can use unbelievers to attack

Christians. Also, since Christians continue to possess the sinful nature in their bodies, we will continue to have a personal struggle within ourselves. James knew his audience had learned a lot from the teachings from the apostles, or even Christ himself before they were scattered beyond the regions of Palestine. He is going to challenge Christians and say, hey guys, it is show time. In effect, he is saying that it is time for application of the word of God to your practical experiences of pains or any uncomfortable situation that you find yourself in.

First, James is not saying that we should burst into laughter when we find ourselves in problems. He said we should consider. The word “consider” in the Greek language carries the idea of accounting or thinking about something. The word could also mean leading or having authority over something. The idea here is that, in times of life problems, we should have a thoughtful consideration concerning the matter. This would help us to be in control of our thoughts rather than depending on our emotions. But he goes ahead to give a reason why such a thoughtful consideration is necessary.

**Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.**

James goes ahead to explain why we should give any form of suffering a thoughtful consideration. Man is a will-intellect-emotional being. Anytime a Christian



enters a problem, he/she is likely to interpret the problem in accordance with the circumstances around him or in some established principles in his conscience. His act, from the “will”, is going to depend either on how he relates his thinking (intellect) or his feelings (emotions) to the situation. Every person act based on his emotions or intellect. Acting on the intellect, although, is a good thing, does not guarantee a good decision. Whether the decision will be a good one or not depends on the kind of information the person has in his mind. If the information is the kind that the Bible has taught, he/she is likely to make a good decision. And again, having the right thought stored in your conscience part of your soul does not guarantee that you are going to apply it. Your ability to apply depends on your present connection with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can fill or influence us and can also be quenched and grieved by our sins and apathy. You see, according to James, a believer’s ability to consider his unpleasant situation a joyful one is tied to his knowledge and understanding of what suffering is meant for in a Christian’s life. Of course, if the suffering Christian does not know what suffering is permitted to do in his life, he/she cannot even interpret his experience in the light of God’s word.

I hate suffering; I know many Christians do too. However, it is not about what we love or hate, what the Bible teaches is what matters. It is not as if God is not powerful enough to command sufferings to be absent from the Christian living. In fact, it is better we

are told the truth, than to be lied to. And since God cannot lie, He can only tell us the truth. The truth is that God was not the one who brought sufferings into the world; Adam, our first human parent did. But the good news is that one day, sufferings will be taken out of this present world. And when will that be? It will be in the future, when Jesus Christ returns with His glorious church on this present earth. Therefore, since there is a time for everything, and that time that God has put in place for the removal of suffering has not come, we, as Christians do not have to be deceived by any kind of human teaching that says that a Christian should not suffer.

Nobody wants to suffer; neither does anyone intentionally invite sufferings into his life. But the point is that we are living in the suffering world. It would be a lie for God to tell Christians that they will not suffer, knowing very well that they are still living in the suffering world, and not heaven. It is just like telling someone to pass through the rain without any umbrella and still promise the person that he will not get wet. Of course, that will be a lie. Unfortunately, there are those whose teachings disagree with the subject of suffering. When Jesus told His disciples that the world would hate them (John 15:18), it was not as if Jesus Christ did not have faith (to confess positive things as men would say). And when the Apostles taught about sufferings, it was not as if they also did not have faith. The idea of suffering has nothing to do with our faith or lack of it. Of course, a person can

bring suffering upon himself; but then, there are sufferings that we do not have control over. So, we must understand that the purpose of suffering in our lives is important. But we must remember that there cannot be a clear understanding of the subject of sufferings without the right knowledge. And the right knowledge is that suffering is part of the Christian life, and it is allowed in the life of a Christian for an incredibly special purpose.

If a Christian does not know that his faith in God can be tested through the unpleasant circumstances of life, he is going to have a problem with his spiritual life. This is because, ignorance of the subject of suffering as part of the spiritual life is going to hinder his spiritual growth. One thing leads to the other in the plan of God. Therefore, when a true doctrine is cut off or rejected, it is going to lead to another true doctrine being cut off, too. For example, if a Christian rejects eternal security as a Christian doctrine, it is going to affect his belief or teachings on spiritual growth; absence of spiritual growth teachings will in turn affect or ignore Christian rewards teachings. Ignoring or rejection of Christian rewards teachings, because of ignorance of the subject, will also lead to the ignoring of the Judgment seat of Christ teaching. So, you notice that rejection of one teaching, directly or indirectly causes the believer or the preacher not to know or learn other related doctrines in the Bible. Why? This is because the Christian doctrines are directly or indirectly related to one another. Just as the entire

body parts are affected when one body part is not functioning well, so the entire theology of the believer is affected negatively by a single rejection or ignorance of a particular doctrine. Until we come to understand that God's word is like a human body with many parts, we can never grow to the true knowledge of Christ.

When our faith in God's word is tested, it produces patience or endurance in our lives. Naturally, we are not patient; we struggle to persevere for long time. We destroy many relationships through our impatience. We find difficulty in waiting on God, whether for Him to take vengeance on our behalf or supplying us with a particular need. We just want everything to happen quickly in our lives. So, what can a loving God do to us to change us or mold us into the very image that He desires? Well, it is for that reason that He allows suffering into our lives to help us acquire a character that we naturally do not have. You see, not that God just wants to frustrate us; God wants us to have a capacity for endurance in every situation of this life. When you can understand the issue like this, you can now sit back and relax your mind whilst you endure the sufferings. This is because you now know and understand what God is seeking to achieve in your life through your present suffering. And you know it now because you have considered. But you could not have also considered it if you had not paid attention to Bible teaching to acquire information and learn about why Christians suffer.

***And let endurance have its perfect result, so that  
you may be perfect and complete,***

James goes ahead to explain the purpose for which suffering is allowed in our lives: “So that you may be perfect and complete”. The word, “perfect” here does not mean being sinless. The word is used here in the sense of maturity. In the process of spiritual growth, there are resources that the Lord uses to facilitate the growth. Unfortunately, many Christians have not yet realized that “suffering” is one of those things that the Lord uses. Christianity is not always about sitting down in a church and learning the word of God; it is also about getting to the office, street and having people creating problems for you, whereby you are expected to remember and apply what you have learned in such time of testing. If Christians were not going to have problems in this life, many of the Christian doctrines would not be needed at all in the Bible. This is because the doctrines would not serve any purpose. But because God is so good and knows that we are still going to have challenges, he made a provision that when used, will stabilize our minds.

In the process of the spiritual growth, there is always a temptation for Christians to be tired of their sufferings and stop enduring. This is the point that we begin to complain and seek for human solutions. And it is for such reason that James commands his audience, and us today, to allow the spiritual growth process to

continue without any interruption, since the process is targeted at our spiritual maturity. To allow the growth process to continue, he said, “And let endurance have its perfect work”. So again, we have another New Testament writer, James, confirming to us that there is spiritual growth in the Christian life. Therefore, spiritual growth does not come with eternal salvation at the same time.

CHAPTER 5

# Resources for the Spiritual Growth

The Advanced English Dictionary defines resource as: 1 [n] available source of wealth; a new or reserve supply that can be drawn upon when needed.

2 [n] a source of aid or support that may be drawn upon when needed.

The above meanings of a resource perfectly fit in the context of our study. There cannot be growth in anything in life without resources to facilitate that growth. The Christian spiritual growth also requires resources. If the Bible teaches about spiritual growth, then it is reasonable that the Bible also teach about the resources to make that expected growth a reality. Just as the teachings on spiritual growth are taught in different passages in the Bible, so the teachings on the resources for the growth are also taught in different passages of the Bible. In this chapter, we are going to look at the resources that have been given to Christians to enable them to go through the growth process. The important question we need to ask is: how does a Christian get the resources? Is there something they must do? The answer is no; there is no

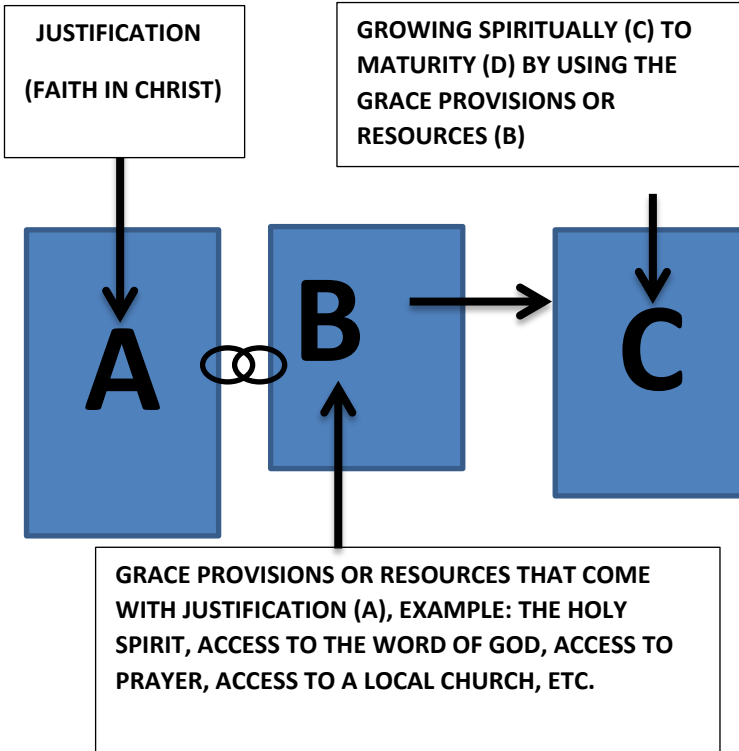
work involved in getting the resources. Those resources are part of the package that salvation through faith comes with. The moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, he instantly receives those resources as part of his salvation package. It is a grace package just as salvation is by the grace of God. We did not work for our salvation; in the same way, we did not work for those resources. Therefore, by grace we have been saved, and by grace we grow spiritually.

It is one thing to be given resources; it is another thing to know what those resources are. So here, having the knowledge of those resources becomes important. That is not all; you also must know how to use those things. Three things are required for the Christian to benefit from the resources given to him.

- i. Firstly, having the Knowledge or awareness that he has been given some resources.
- ii. Secondly, he needs to know the exact resources that are given.
- iii. Lastly, he needs to know how each of those resources function. The diagram below illustrates the spiritual life: from salvation to maturity.



## SPIRITUAL LIFE CHART



From the diagram, you notice that justification (A) is tied with certain divine provisions (B). The concept you need to understand is that immediately a person believes in Jesus Christ, he receives or have access to growth provisions. The person might never know until

he is taught from scripture what he has received in the Lord.

**The diagram presents the following points:**

1. Justification (A) comes together with certain grace provisions (B)
2. Justification (A) is not the same as the grace provisions (B)
3. The grace provisions (B) come together with justification (A) at the same moment a person believes in Christ.
4. The grace provisions (B) follow or accompany Justification (A); they do not precede Justification (A)
5. The grace provisions (B) are given purposely for usage (C).
6. The grace provisions (B) are given to target spiritual growth (D)
7. The process of growth (C) may not be conspicuous, but the result of spiritual growth (D) is always visible.
8. There is a gap between grace provisions (B) and spiritual growth (D). This gap is the process (C) that exists between them.
9. The result of spiritual growth (D) does not come with justification (A). This is the very point many Christians miss. You do not believe in Jesus Christ and start becoming like Christ at the same time, no. you will go through a series of processes.
10. The process (C) is run with a mixture of both grace provisions (B) and things such as trials or

sufferings of this life. Proper use (C) of the grace provisions (B) during temptations, trials, attacks, is what brings out the Christ-like result or character (D)

### **Bible Teaching**

Bible teaching is one of those resources that facilitate a Christian's spiritual growth. Nobody comes to the Christian faith with knowledge or knows of how that family is run. Therefore, he/she needs to submit themselves to the teachings from the scriptures. The doctrines in the Bible come in the form of statements, promises and instructions that are communicated from the scripture. Some of those statements or doctrines need to be explained to the new believer. He is supposed to learn through Bible teachings about the present benefits that he has now received because of his faith in Jesus Christ. In addition to that, he needs to start learning the entire Christian doctrines one after the other. Ignorance of any of the doctrines that form part of the Christian faith is going to affect his understanding on certain passages in the Bible. Continuous hearing of Bible teaching enables us to understand the Christian faith, from which we have our practical Christian life. If the doctrines are not stored up in our minds, we cannot make the right application. A sound teaching in our minds delivers us from many troubles.

***Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for***

***yourself and for those who hear you.***

***1Timothy 4:16***

From the verse above, we see the importance of sound teaching, both to the pastor, and his congregation. Sound teaching does not only save the pastor from deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (1Timothy 4:1-2) or worldly fables (v7), but it also saves the congregation from falling into them. Unfortunately, today's Christianity has witnessed many preachers who are propagating doctrines of demons without even knowing. The word is "deception"; Satan's deceptive strategy has caught many in his trap. It is so amazing; some preachers do not even know that Satan can reveal to them. The rejection of the complete revelation of the Bible and the pursuit of additional revelations has totally caused many preachers to be blind to all the demonic doctrines and the deceit. Some preachers get deceived and they in turn deceive their congregation without knowing it. (2 Timothy 2:13). Satan never respects anyone; neither is he afraid of any preacher or believer in Christ. He is the most intelligent, smartest, craftiest creature that has ever existed. In fact, the scripture says that he can reveal himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). The only way to save us from falsehood is through perseverance in His revealed word or teachings. Once we reject the teachings from the Bible, we are on our own; nothing remains to protect us again from any deception. So here, Paul admonished Timothy to persevere in the Christian faith or doctrines to save himself from any false teachings.

### **The Holy Spirit**

God the Holy Spirit is one of the resources for the Christian's spiritual growth. There cannot be growth in any Christian without the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit's ministry is clearly defined in the Bible. He was sent to indwell Christians permanently. He can also fill or influence Christians. He also teaches Christians the written word. Today, the Holy Spirit is not giving us a new revelation; instead, He is illuminating our minds to understand what is already written. Even though He influences Christians, He does not control Christians like a robot. He can be quenched (1 Thess. 5:19) and be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). When that happens, His influence on us stops temporarily until we confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and stop whatever thing that grieved or quenched Him. Because sin is very distractive and hinders a Christian's spiritual growth, a divine solution to overcome sin is given by Paul in the statement below.

***But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16.***

By constantly being filled with God the Holy Spirit, a Christian saves himself from the fleshly demands of the sin nature which indwells his body. Also, one other thing that the Holy Spirit does is to pick up the word of God, which we have learned and stored in our souls, and use it as a sword to fight every spiritual battle which the mind is engaged in. The Spirit can only do so when a Christian has the word stored in his human spirit. Understanding this point is important since the

Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He always needs something (doctrine) or a specific teaching or word that He can use to work in the believer's mind. Ignorance of Bible doctrine limits the Spirit's work, even though He constantly indwells Christians.

### **Prayer**

In what way does prayer become a resource for the spiritual growth? Every doctrine in the Bible is essential for the believer's growth including prayer. If we do not abide in the vine (including prayer and doctrine) we do not grow. If we do not continue in His word, we are not growing as disciples. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. Talking to God is part of our growing in His grace and being in fellowship with Him as we confess our failures and shortcomings and fulfill our joy. Also, since we do not finish growing before praying, it is reasonable to say that prayer plays an important role in the spiritual growth process. Prayer does not have to be always a result of spiritual growth. Yes, its effectiveness can be a result of growth, but it also plays a role in the initial process of growth when a new Christian starts learning the word of God. However, one thing must be clear, prayer alone cannot cause growth. Therefore, prayer and the word of God must go hand in hand. Spiritual growth is measured in terms of works or application. Nobody can testify of your growth except through your application of the word of God. If one has the word in his mind but unable to apply it, it profits him nothing. Since it is possible to have the word in our minds but unable to

apply without prayer, it means that we need to pray always.

***But if anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5.***

A growing believer, who may be tempted to give up in his endurance and possibly seek for human solutions because of prolonged suffering, is asked to pray for wisdom in applying the word of God. It is one thing to have the teachings in your mind; it is something else to apply it to real life situations. Sometimes, too many distractions trap us from applying the word; it is in such moments that prayer becomes critical to our growth. Every trial is a great opportunity for a Christian to accelerate his growth. Here, prayer becomes our energizer as it will help achieve what God intends a particular suffering or trial to accomplish.

### **The local church**

The local church is one of the resources to which Christians have access. It is a place instituted by God for our learning of His word. It is a classroom for learning all the doctrines in the Bible. In fact, the Bible describes the local church as a pillar and the support for spiritual truth (1Timothy 3:15). After believing in Jesus Christ, a believer needs to be taught. It is from the teachings provided in the Church that he can grow spiritually. The local church also becomes a place where he can have an opportunity to function with his spiritual gifts. This does not mean that they cannot

learn the word of God outside their local churches, but that becomes easier since they may have learned certain basic truths from which certain advance truth can be built on.

We live in a time that scripture information is not difficult to come by. Therefore, one's learning of the word is not limited to his local assembly. And again, belonging to a local church does not guarantee that you are going to have sound Bible teaching. In fact, we live in a time that most churches do not even know that the local assembly is a place of learning God's word. To some, it has become a place of teaching about themselves. To others too, it is a place of entertainment and magical display. Remember that God will not evaluate our deeds by looking at which local church we belonged; rather, by how we responded to the apostolic-Christian faith that was once and for all delivered to all the churches, including today's churches (Jude 3). There are so many things to learn after one is saved by grace. For this reason, the writer of the book of Hebrews commands Christians not to stop going to church.

***And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near  
Hebrews 10:24-26***

The local Church or assembly is ordained to be a resource or place where we encourage one another



through the word of God. There is no encouragement that is as helpful as hearing God's word being shared. Therefore, since some cannot understand certain teachings on their own; they need the help of some Christians who have the gifts of teaching or encouragement and can articulate the message well for the benefit of others.

Resources are always important and a requirement to operate in many areas of our lives. For example, we cannot be active without food. Because we draw energy from food to work. A car draws its energy from the fuel that is put in the tank; a plant draws its energy from the soil and the sun to grow and bear fruits. The same is true with the Christian life. But the question we need to ask is: has God given us everything we need to walk the spiritual life? Concerning such a question Apostle Peter has this to say in his epistle,

***Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" 2 Peter 1:2-3***

As Christians, we need to learn how to distinguish a wish from a reality. Often we mistake a wish for a reality. If you told me you were going for a job interview, and I said, "May you be chosen or selected for employment as you go for the interview in Jesus name", I was not guaranteeing your automatic

selection for the Job; I was only wishing you would be selected. Whether the organization would employ you or not would depend on your performance during the interview or whether it was God's will for you to work there. Wishes are not realities. Biblical wishes are potentials, but not a guarantee.

From the passage above, Peter is making a wish in his greetings toward his audience. Whether they were going to enjoy the grace and the peace of God in their relationship with God depended on what they would do with all the divine resources that had been made available for the spiritual life. By logic, they did not have what Peter was wishing them. If they did, he would not be wishing them. He wished them enjoyment of grace and peace since they had the potential. Peter did not say, "I declare and decree the grace and peace of God unto you" because he understood words and their meanings. He understood the spiritual growth as potential since all that is needed is available to the believer. But having something is one thing; using that thing to do what it is meant for is something else. He was awfully specific for the means or how the grace and peace will be multiplied to them in their spiritual life. He specified that it was through the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is very wrong for us to think that since Peter is wishing grace and peace, we automatically have them as Christians. To be specific, the grace and peace

spoken of here are not the same as the saving grace of Ephesians 2:8-9, which is available to all unbelievers. This grace is the grace that comes with salvation/justification in our spiritual life diagram. The peace in the verse is not a reconciliation peace, which we did not have before as unbelievers. This peace is a reference to the enjoyment of an inner peace, which is a potential and comes as a result of the Christian's use of the divine resources that was given him when he believed in Jesus Christ. To ignore the means of enjoying this grace and peace will deprive the Christian from enjoying those benefits.

You cannot reject God's word and expect to have peace of mind. Tranquility or stability of the mind is something that only Christians enjoy as they keep growing in the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge brings understanding; and understanding brings stable mind. When we lack understanding of issues because of lack of adequate information, we end up being confused and unhappy. An unhappy mind is not a peaceful mind.

I always love to distinguish reason from purpose. The two are not the same, even though we often use them interchangeably. Apostle Peter went ahead to explain his reason of making such a wishful greeting: God has given or granted to Christians everything we need to live the spiritual life. "Everything" in the passage means exactly what it says, it means, "everything". However, the idea of context should not escape the

believer's notice. In the same context Peter said it was in relation to the spiritual life. Therefore, we should be careful not to read material things into the meaning of "Everything" here. We may lack certain material things, but the point is that every spiritual resource for the Christian life and growth has been given to us. Again, Peter goes ahead to repeat that the only way we can realize those blessings of God's grace and peace is through the true knowledge of Him. This means that God's grace provision cannot be multiplied apart from knowing more of Jesus through Bible teachings or hearing.

CHAPTER 6

# Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

- **Ignorance**

One of the greatest problems Christians face in life is not necessarily about our struggle with Satan and his schemes; instead, the greatest problem is the level of ignorance that exists among many Christians. Whilst many Christians may demonstrate great amount of knowledge in politics, football, and certain issues of life, they are ignorant of the word of God. Many are ignorant of how the Bible is to be interpreted and applied, and how principles are to be drawn from certain passages and applied. Ignorance of a particular fact relating to a particular thing can deprive you of not enjoying the full blessing of that very thing. For example, you may have a smart phone but ignorant of many of the phone's capabilities. As far as you are concerned the phone is useful for only making calls. However, the manufacturer of the phone built other useful applications inside the phone. For you to be aware of it or able to do it, someone must teach you. You see, just as ignorance exist in many areas of our lives, so it is in our spiritual life, too. Everybody enters Christianity as an ignorant person as far as knowledge of the Christian faith (all the Christian doctrines) is concerned. Having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for dying for your sins, the rest of your life is to be devoted

to seeking the true knowledge of Him who saved you. Remember that Christ's death for your sins is not the only knowledge or information about Him. There are so many doctrines that are centered on the person of Christ. In fact, the entire Bible is centered on the person of Jesus Christ. Every bit of knowledge about Him has its special blessings upon our lives. It is for this reason that we are told to grow in knowledge of Him. The more of Him we know, the more of Him we become. The more you stay with a person the more you know about that person.

The Bible speaks against ignorance, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Life is expected to be lived out; be it physical life or spiritual life. For example, a seed must grow and bear fruit. However, certain factors can affect the growth of the seed and its fruit bearing. Like that of a seed, eternal life, from which we have spiritual life, needs to grow and bear fruit of righteousness. But certain things can hinder this fruit bearing from happening, of which ignorance is one of those things. In the Old testament God connected the destruction of the Jews to ignorance (lack of knowledge).

***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. Hosea 4:6.***

Having abandoned God's word for years, the northern part of Israel was finally taken to captivity as God had forewarned them. They rejected the teachings of the law and established their own belief systems from idol worship. The teachings from the Law of Moses were no longer important to them. Like today, so many Christians are not interested in what the Apostles received and wrote down to the churches, from which we have the New Testament. You see, application or "doing something" comes from one's conviction or belief. Before, you do or apply something; it is because you believe in what is said about that thing. It was not as if the Jews were not doing anything or applying anything at all; they were applying or doing something. However, what they applied was not in the Law in the first place. And since those evil things had become their convictions or beliefs, they were inseparably united with their actions. You cannot separate your actions or doings from your belief system; whatever you believe, you act upon.

So, rejection of the Law affected their spiritual life. The result was that the Lord also rejected them, by giving them to the Assyrians for destruction and slavery. Drawing a principle from the Jews' experience with God's rejection, we, as Christians, can also be rejected or disciplined severely if we continue to reject the Christian faith handed to us by the apostles and prophets of the universal church of God. God is not going to bring wicked nations to take Christians to captivity as He did to the Jews; but He can destroy us

by using so many means. He can destroy us with sickness, or even physical death (1 Corinthians 11:30). More so, His Judgment against unrighteousness can be demonstrated towards us by giving us to our own lustful desires till we are destroyed by them (Romans 1:24).

Ignorance can be a dangerous thing in a person's life. A Christian can be very faithful in going to church every day and remain ignorant throughout his Christian life if there is no sound Bible teaching in the local assembly. It is not just going to church that matters; it is about what you are expected to receive when you are there. The New Testament also rejects ignorance. In fact, Christianity is all about living a particular life. However, you cannot live that unique life without the knowledge that is associated with it. It is not about imitating the life, no; it is about living the real life through the power of the Holy Spirit as is stated by the Bible. The only way to remove any form of ignorance is to be properly informed. Sound information fills up a vacuum, or certain unawareness. Since ignorance is about not knowing or being unaware of something, to be aware of something is to be properly informed about it. Many times, Apostle Paul told his congregation that he did not want them to be ignorant (Rom. 1:13; 11: 25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor.1:8; 1 Thess. 4:13).

In all those verses, the apostle demonstrated that the only way to remove ignorance from a Christian's mind is to furnish the ignorant person with the right



information. However, the information cannot be helpful to the ignorant person if he is not humble enough to learn or accept the objective data from the scriptures which is presented before him. The very fact that Paul wrote that he did not want Christians in his day to be ignorant suggests to us that ignorance exist among Christians.

- **Sin**

Besides ignorance, one other thing that can be a great hindrance to our spiritual growth is sin (personal sin). Sin is described in different ways in scripture; it can refer to the fallen nature, sometimes called “the flesh” (Rom 5:12, 6:12, 7:14.); and can also refer to any act that violates any divine command or principle. The two are not the same. After believing that Jesus died for our sins, we still possess a sin nature even though Christ crucified the sin nature on the cross. The sin nature crucifixion on the cross, by virtue of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is positional in nature rather than experiential. After believing in Christ, all Christians, without exception, have experienced or committed sin before. Christians do commit sin because they still possess the flesh or the sin nature in them. However, the sin nature can be controlled because of their new relationship with Jesus Christ. The new birth which comes through faith in Christ gives us many provisions through which we can control the temptations from the sin nature. Unbelievers cannot control the sin nature in anyway;

this is because they do not have the divine provisions to control it.

To whom much is given, much is expected. Since Christians have been given so much provision, they are to use them in order not to sin; failure to rely on those divine provisions is not an excuse. God desires all Christians to forsake sin and grow spiritually. Personal sin can disrupt the process of growth. The sin could be a thought or mental attitude (jealousy, hatred); verbal (judging, maligning); or overt sin (fornication, murder, thievery). Sin comes in different shades and forms; no matter how small we think a sin is, it still disrupts the growth process. Sin interferes with the influence of the Holy Spirit's work in the growth process. Any acts of sin grieve the Holy Spirit, thereby rendering Him inactivate as far as influencing the soul of the sinning Christian is concerned. To allow the Holy Spirit to have control over the sinning Christian's soul, he/she needs to confess his/her sins. Remember that confession of sin, as we have it in 1 John 1:9, is a provision for those who are already Christians to come back to fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Nobody confesses their sins to be saved; they must believe in Jesus death, burial, and resurrection to be saved. If an unbeliever confesses that he is a sinner, it still does not mean anything, except he believes that Jesus died for his sins. The only time that Christians are going to lose or be freed from the possession of the sin nature is when we die physically, or at the rapture occurs.

- **Worry**

The sin of worry can also be a great hindrance to the believer's spiritual growth. Worry is oftentimes taken for granted but it is an extremely dangerous experience to allow one's self into. The worrying Christian in effect is saying that his problem is beyond God's ability or power. Is there any problem that exists in our lives that God cannot solve? If we believe that God can solve our problem, then there is no need to worry. So, to worry about our problems is to conclude that God cannot solve our problems. Worry is a sin because it is unbelief; and the Bible says that whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Therefore, Jesus rebuked His disciples in Matthew 6:25-34 for worrying about basic necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter. According to Jesus, our worries do not solve and cannot solve our problems. A worrying person is a person who lacks faith in what God has promised, and such a person cannot please God (Hebrews 6:8).

Like any other sin, worry hinders Christian growth. We should remember that it is God the Holy Spirit who is the agent of growth and He uses God's word to bring growth or continuous bearing of Christ-like character in the believer. Therefore, once a believer starts worrying, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and this interrupts whatever influence He was exercising in the believer. Jesus explicitly stated that worry hinders Christian growth. This is how He put it:

***The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. Luke 8:14***

Here, Jesus is clearly giving us distracters or hindrances to spiritual growth. Not only do we see worry as a major distracter, but also riches and pleasures of this life. A person's reliance on his riches can lead him to think that he does not need God since he has everything he needs. Pleasures of this life are also a factor. Clearly, many Christians today have demonstrated their love for football, politics, TV programs, and constant entertaining programs which take most of their time. Because of this, they have truly little or no time for God.

Both Peter and Paul tell us how we should deal with our worrying situation. Here is Peter's solution to deal with worry:

***Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7***

What a promise we have as Christians! We have been assured that God cares for us. The question is: do you believe this promise that God cares for whatever problem you are going through? If you do not meditate on this promise and rest on it, you will be the one to lose; you will be miserable, frustrated, and unstable in your mind. God knows what worry or cares of this life does to the human mind; it destabilizes the mind and puts the worrying person in a state of constant fear. It is also important for us to understand that this promise

does not mean that God is going to remove every problem or challenge in our lives. There may be trials that God will allow in our lives for some time as an instrument to facilitate our spiritual growth; there may be other trials that God may not take away for our own spiritual benefit. This is why God has given us enough promises or resources to enable us to endure whatever we are going through.

Apostle Paul also tells us the mechanics of handling worries. According to Paul, one of the ways of handling worry is not only by meditation on God's promises, but also to Pray. He puts it this way:

***Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. - Philippians 4:6.***

We are told to talk to God in prayer concerning things that worry us. God knows how to take away our worry; not necessarily the problem itself, but the thoughts of worry that saturate our minds. Worry and inner peace cannot coexist. Through prayer, God takes away the worry and this brings peace into our minds. Therefore, anytime you see that you are worrying about something, just humbly go on your knees and talk to God about it. The result of prayer concerning the worry is stated in verse 7. In effect, Paul is saying, hey guys, do not joke with prayer when worried about something. This is what prayer brings:

***And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7***

This is another special promise from God. If only we will pray or talk to God about our problems, He is more than able to bring peace which is from God to guard our troubling hearts or minds.

- **The World**

Like many other Bible terms, the term, “world” can only be understood in the context in which it is used. This is because the word is used to describe different things in the Bible. “World”, which is the translation of the Greek word κόσμος, i.e., “kosmos” means orderliness, arrangement, or decoration. It emphasizes on something well planned in an orderly manner. “Kosmos” or “world” has a lot of connotations in different contexts.” Kosmos” or” world” is used in the Bible to describe the following: planet earth (1John 3:17), human race (Matthew 5:14), gentiles (Romans 11:12), and present conditions of human affairs, including human ideologies or belief systems (Colossians 2:8). Therefore “kosmos” or world does not mean sinfulness as some think. The word carries the idea of orderliness or careful arrangement of something. Example, if we look at the physical world, we can see that it is carefully arranged.

“Kosmos” has a verb, “kosmein”, which means to arrange or to adorn. It is from the word that we have our English word, “Cosmetics”, also known as make-

up. Cosmetics or make-up are substances or products used to enhance or alter the appearance or fragrance of the human body, especially, ladies. Therefore, a believer is advised not to be conformed to the well planned, well arranged, well calculated, and well adorned ideas of the world. In other words, there are so many ideas in the world that are so beautiful, stimulating, well organized, both in their development and presentation, yet they are unprofitable to the spiritual life of a believer. This is because they gradually draw the believer's mind from his relationship with God. The cosmic idea is a well arranged, planned, and adorned idea that becomes difficult for any person without much discernment from the word of God to see the wrongness of it.

Whilst it is true that Satan is the source of the world system, human beings are the agents through which His ideas or system is passed on from one person to the other if unchecked. Without seeing God's word as the sole source for your guiding principles in life, you can be lured into Satanic or world system and even become a promoter of it. Both believers and unbelievers are faced with the world system. It can be received and passed on by politicians, the media, pastors, kings, and even the ordinary man on the street through conversation. The media can give a whole lot of attention or hours of discussion on a particular cosmos idea without even knowing that they are just promoting Satan's agenda. God has warned Christians concerning the world system.

***And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2.***

You notice that this verse tells what Christians are not to do, and what they are to do. We are told not to be conformed to the world system, be it a thought, policy, action, etc. But the only way we can save ourselves from not being conformed to it is by the renewing of our minds. It is a great deception for any Christian to think that he or she has power of their own to resist the deceitful and forceful ideas of the world without continuous or daily renewal of their minds. There is no middle ground here; either you are renewing your mind every day by exposing your mind to sound Bible teachings to gain fresh strength from the Lord to resist the pressures of this world or you become apathetic towards sound Bible teaching, and the result is that you will have no strength to resist being conformed to the world.

Again, we are told not to love the world or things in them. In the book of Revelation Jesus promised that Christians who overcome the world will receive special promotion and reward at His coming (see Rev.2:7, 17; 3:5, 12, 21). This tells us how important it is for Christians to know about the things that hinder their spiritual progress, not just sin, but also knowing that the 'world' is a great hindrance.



***Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. - 1John 2:15***

To love the world is to be conformed to the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of the world. The solution to loving the world is to constantly renew our minds so that our minds or thinking can be conformed to the image of God. Setting one's eyes on materialism is part of loving the world. But the question is what would make a person set his mind on material things instead of things above? The answer differs because of different motives. Some are materialistically possessed in their minds because they feel that it is the only way for them to feel important in society. Lust for human attention or recognition becomes their primary motive. Thus, they will engage in every evil act to achieve. Unfortunately, the world system approves of that too since the world system indeed gives value or special importance to people who have material things. Only God's word can save any believer from this kind of system or temptation since the Bible will teach him to understand that not a single praise or congratulatory message will come to them after they die simply because they were rich, popular, influential, or powerful. A case in point for a believer falling for the world system is Demas in 2 Timothy.

***Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 2Timothy 4:9-10.***

It is quite easy for any believer to be trapped in the world system. Therefore, scripture warns us so that we do not become victims like Demas. Money is a wonderful thing, but if care is not taken it can become a substitute for one's fellowship with God. Make no mistake to think that Demas was an unbeliever; he was a believer who was part of those who had been with Paul. Apparently, he felt he was not getting anything in ministry and felt it was a waste of time, therefore had to quit. Or maybe he could not endure whatever suffering he was going through.

CHAPTER 7

# Why The Need To Remain Faithful?

Why must a Christian remain faithful to the Lord? What at all is he going to get for remaining faithful by persevering in whatever challenge he is going through without giving up their walk with God? There is some sort of motivation behind why we do what we do. For example, people spend years to go to school with the motivation that they will get a good job after school and have a wonderful life. Some travel to developed countries with the motivation that life will become better. Some work hard on duty with the motivation that one day there might be a promotion for them. Therefore, motivation becomes the basis for which we strive in whatever we do in life. Whilst there may be different motivations for serving God, God has assured us a reward that will be given to all faithful Christians at the judgment seat of Christ. The apostles of Jesus Christ could not hide their motivation for following or serving the Lord. They felt they should be rewarded for being faithful throughout the three and a half years with Christ. This is what their leader, Peter, asked the Lord,

***Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed you; what then will there be for us?" And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:27***

Please, notice that Peter's question was not about going to heaven. He did not ask, "Are we going to make it to heaven for following you?" They were interested in something they would possess physically or a position they would occupy. Jesus then assured them what they would get when He returns during the restoration of things in His second advent. Once again, notice that Jesus' answer to them was not about assurance of salvation or heaven; rather, it was about reward. Jesus did not say, since you have followed me, you will make it to Heaven. What He promised them was not about going to heaven; it was about reward for faithful service. This reward, per the text, is going to be a special privilege of becoming part of Jesus cabinet during the millennium. Jesus is not going to do things like a magician, no; He is going to assign His faithful servants of this age to the various tasks that are going to be performed on the earth for that one thousand years. So clearly, there is something special reserved for everyone who walks with the Lord faithfully. To be sure, the issue is not about going to heaven; rather, it is about being faithful so that you receive a reward for it. But we need to also understand

that we cannot be faithful without growing spiritually. It is through our spiritual growth that we can manifest faithfulness toward God.

Apostle Paul's motivation was also expressed in the words below as he anticipated the receipt of his reward.

***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, also to all who have loved His appearing***  
**Timothy 4:7-8**

There is no way any objective Bible student can get around this verse and turn it into salvation or "how to go to heaven" passage. It is crystal clear that Paul is talking about something other than heaven that the Lord will award to him. Heaven is not awarded for good work done, no; it is our birth right since it is our Father's hometown. We come from the same place that our human parents come from not because we did something good to qualify being from there. Often we long to see the Lord promote us right here on this earth, but the point is this, the reward is laid up in heaven, not here. Whilst the Lord can bless us, whether by promoting us in our businesses or blessing us materially, that earthly blessings or promotions cannot be compared to the heavenly reward that is reserved for all faithful Christians. The faithfulness is measured in terms like: "fighting good fight", "finishing the course", and "keeping the faith". For one to be

faithful, one must be a disciple of Jesus Christ by carrying his cross and follow Jesus. Paul's description here is the same as saying, I have become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have carried my cross to the end without quitting.

***Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.***  
**Galatians 5:9-10.**

We shall reap what, Heaven? Not heaven, but a reward. We are to do good to reap reward but not heaven. It is just unfortunate that so many Christians read heaven into passages that say nothing about going to heaven. "In due time" in the verse is referring to the appearing of Christ, which Paul makes mention of in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. This promise of reward is especially important because we easily get tired of doing good continuously to people that we have been helping. God knows this very well and therefore knows that a reward can be a great motivation for us since by such a promise of reward, we will not see our commitment in serving God by way of supporting people as waste of time and resources, especially towards those who are fellow Christians. Again, Christians can only keep on doing good to others only when they keep growing spiritually. Until we keep growing spiritually as Jesus puts it, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do

nothing (John 15: 5). Apart from growing or continuous abiding in Christ, we will have no strength in ourselves to continue the good work that we are doing.

Still on reward for the faithful, Apostle Paul has this to say:

***<sup>11</sup>It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; <sup>12</sup>If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us. 2Timothy 2:11-12***

Two separate things are presented in this verse: our salvation and reward. Our salvation is described in verse 11 whilst reward is described in verse 12. Failure to understand this distinction can create a serious problem for the Bible students or any believer. The doctrine of reward is a doctrine or teachings in the Bible that many Christians have never known for years. This happened because they were carried away by salvation by works. Once a person thinks that he/she can be saved by his/her own good works, he cannot understand reward as a true Christian doctrine. This is because, in his mind, heaven is what is supposed to be our reward.

But as we can see from the verse above, Christians died with Christ. The tense of the first part of verse 11 is in past tense, not future tense. It says, "For if we died with Him". This is true of the statement not because we died physically with Jesus Christ on the cross, but it is because His death is credited to all who have believed in Him as if they also died with Him. This

truth is sometimes termed as positional truth, theologically. Because we believe in Christ, we are identified with Him not only in His death, but also in His burial, and resurrection as if we are already resurrected with Him. So, the last part of verse 11 guarantees Christians resurrection in the future. In other words, if the first statement is true, then it means that the last statement stands true. Since it is true that we died with him, because of our identification with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection, we are also going to live (resurrect and be with Him). This is strictly about our salvation or going to heaven.

Now let us look at the reward part for those who will not just go to heaven simply because they have trusted Jesus Christ for dying for their sins, but because they have really worked for the Lord in this life after they accepted Him as their savior. It is one thing to be saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone; it is another thing to commit to serving the Lord after He has saved you. This is exactly what Paul means in verse 12. Part of serving the Lord is about enduring in difficult times of our service to Him. Whatever a Christian does because His Christian faith demands it, it is considered as serving the Lord. Sometimes things get tough and we feel like quitting from what we know is clearly demanded of us. Paul says we do not have to quit doing it; in other words, we must keep enduring doing it since there is a reward attached to every good work we do. Paul goes ahead to explain the specific



reward. He says that the reward is about reigning with Jesus Christ on the face of the earth for one thousand years. What a privilege it will be to be part of Jesus cabinet to rule this world. This does not mean the reward will only be about ruling or reigning with Christ; there will be other privileges of serving the Lord if one does not quit.

But Paul goes ahead to warn us that if we deny the Lord, He will also deny us. The question that immediately pops up in our minds is: what is He going to deny us of? This is where it gets tricky in Bible interpretation. If you do not look at the context, you are definitely going to misinterpret the text because one's theological influence. The preceding statement had just stated a reward of reigning with Christ for those who endure. Therefore, the denial here is about denying unfaithful Christians who also denied serving Him after they had believed in Him for their salvation. Therefore, we need to be motivated by the fact that our labor in serving God presently in our walk with Him, will not be in vain but will be rewarded at His coming.

May the reader of this book be encouraged in serving the Lord without growing weary; knowing that greater things are awaiting us. But you must also know the strength for enduring, doing good, or becoming a true disciple lies on our constant growth in the grace and in the knowledge of Him. "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless

before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25kV)