

## INTRODUCTION

Spiritual growth is the Spirit-led process of a disciple maturing in three ways. He begins to know God on an intimate level; he gains wisdom and insight about his personal identity; and, he understands God's will for his life. The result of this growth is a transformation of his mind and behavior to reflect the image of Christ. For example, every time a believer learns something new about God's call on his life and then walks in that destiny, he grows by being transformed in his thinking and behavior.

Spiritual growth is not about becoming a "better person." It's about "learning" to act like the new person God made at the moment of salvation and sanctification. According to Paul, in Ephesians 2:10, a Christian is made God's masterpiece at that moment. It is then that the Christian begins to do good works. Believers should think of spiritual growth as a practical way of discovering who God made them to be so that they can please Him in every way (Colossians 1:10).

According to Luke 2:52, Jesus set forth the perfect example of spiritual growth. He grew in wisdom and favor, with God, by doing the perfect will of the Father (John 8:29). When a person is born again, he immediately begins to participate in the same divine nature as Jesus (2 Peter 1:4) and should grow spiritually with God, in wisdom and favor, by doing the perfect will of the Father (Romans 12:2).

Spiritual growth should come as naturally to a Christian as an apple growing on a healthy apple tree. Jesus taught, in John 15:5, that His disciples would naturally bear, "much fruit," if they daily abide in Him. A disciple shouldn't feel burdened by trying to change himself. He should focus on abiding in Jesus so he can naturally change from the inside out.

Though spiritual growth is natural, Jesus taught, in John 15:2, that growth must be intentional. A branch engrafted into a vine will naturally grow much fruit to glorify the Father, but a disciple must intentionally allow himself to be pruned while faithfully remaining in Christ. In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul states that the believer must choose to keep in step with the Holy Spirit and avoid the deeds of the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit will only grow naturally in a believer's life if he intentionally keeps in step with the Spirit.

This paper will explain what happens at salvation and sanctification, and the difference between maturity and the personal identity set forth as a foundation for growing by "knowing and showing." At the end, I will also share helpful charts to help explain how it all fits together.

## UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAPPENDS AT SALVATION

The Scriptures teach us that the moment a person believes in Jesus they are; (1) Completely saved from God's wrath, Ephesians 2:8; (2) Born again in their inner nature by the Holy Spirit, John 3:6; (3) Instantaneously made a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17; (4) Made God's finished masterpiece, Ephesians 2:10; (5) Spiritually perfected, Hebrews 12:23; (6) Purified in their soul, 1 Peter 1:22; (7) Wholly sanctified, 1 Corinthians 6:11; (8) Given a brand new heart of flesh, Ezekiel 36:26-27; (9) Imputed the righteousness of Jesus, 2 Corinthians 5:21; and, (10) Given the mind of Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:16. Therefore, spiritual growth is learning to "know and show" all that God accomplishes at salvation.

From Jesus' standpoint, "It is finished," in regard to salvation and sanctification; a

Christian starts at the finish line.<sup>1</sup> Though spiritual growth is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, it is not for the purpose of changing one's nature, but of changing thoughts and behavior. Spiritual growth and sanctification are separate and distinct works of the Holy Spirit. Though sanctification happened once and for all, spiritual growth is ongoing. Sanctification has to do with nature. Spiritual growth has to do with maturity. (More will be said in the next section about the complete and entire work of sanctification.)

Looking back to Genesis 2:7, we see that God created mankind in His image to be a spiritual soul who lives in a fleshly body. What is meant in this paper by "spiritual soul" is, "the personality of man made in the image of God." By the "image of God" I mean spiritual substance, not physical substance. Much could be written here on dualism, but for the sake of time I will refer the reader to, *Minding the Heart*, by Robert Saucy for further study on the biblical meaning of "heart, soul, and spirit."

When man sinned, his spiritual soul was separated from God and his flesh was cursed. Together, his soul and body was sentenced to death (Ezekiel 18:20). However, Jesus came in the "likeness" of sinful flesh (though born sinless of a virgin) to condemn sin (in His body) by being the perfect sacrifice (Romans 8:3). Because of Jesus, mankind can have all the blessings given at salvation- a new, regenerated spirit and a purified soul (Hebrews 12:23 & 1 Peter 1:23).

Though the spiritual soul has been fully saved, the cursed flesh still remains until death, i.e., "the body of death," Romans 7:24. However, according to Paul in Galatians 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and

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<sup>1</sup> It would be good to note that I have been greatly influenced by the, "Finished Work" doctrine of William Durham (1910). It is a more robust and biblically sound version of Wesley's, "Christian Perfection" doctrine.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted the verses quoted will come from the NIV.

desires.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the Christian is to consider his flesh (earthly body) with its passions and desires, dead and crucified with Christ on the cross at Calvary. Note that Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24 that the flesh has “passions and desires.” These are not the same as the desires of the believer’s soul. In 1 Peter 2:11 (NKJV), Peter stated, “Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Peter plainly states that fleshly lusts war against the soul because the soul is separate from the flesh. The flesh discussed in the New Testament is nothing more than the actual physical body with its organs, senses, and instincts controlled by the brain.

The best evidence of this fact is death itself. The orthodox position has always been that when the body dies the spiritual soul lives on. Paul said, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “to be away from the body [is to be] at home with the Lord.” John wrote, in Revelation 6:9, how people can be absent from the body and still be present with the Lord, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God.” The soul that is saved will live in the presence of God after death.

A Christian’s soul and spirit is changed at rebirth. The Holy Spirit makes new the spirit of man and purifies the soul (mind, will, and emotions). In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter wrote, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” Notice, Peter proclaims that the believer’s soul is purified and able to love fervently with a pure heart. Sadly, there are some Christians, today, who believe that their soul is still dirty and their heart is wicked. Without a doubt a sinner’s heart is, “deceitful above all things and beyond cure,” (Jeremiah 17:9). However, the heart of the reborn Christian has been fully

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted the verses quoted will come from the NIV.

purified and made new (Ezekiel 36:26).

### AT SALVATION, IS SANCTIFICATION COMPLETE OR ONGOING?

When I first became a Christian, I was taught to think about, both, spiritual growth and sanctification as a long, tedious journey of endless religious rules and struggles that would ultimately lead to spiritual change. The idea was that when a person came to Christ, he became a lump of clay in God's hands. God's "sanctifying work" was to mold and form the clay, making the Christian into a better person by continually conforming them to His image.

I was to regard myself as being saved, but I was still a "wretched mess" on the inside that needed a lifetime of cleaning through the process of sanctification. Thus, to the extent that a Christian cooperated with God was the extent to which they would change on the inside and become more like Jesus.<sup>3</sup> In Romans 8, we were taught to view Paul's struggle with the flesh as an example for all believers, humbly preparing us for many defeats against the flesh. Though we were to believe salvation is complete, we have to remain on God's potter's wheel of sanctification for the rest of our lives in hopes to be found faithful by God on Judgment Day. We might have been more in line with Rome's version of Purgatory than we thought- not differing with its need or function, but rather with its location. For the Roman Catholic, his "cleansing" comes in the afterlife. Ours would be here on earth.

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<sup>3</sup> The biblical examples normally given for the idea of God continually working on the believer as clay for the purpose of sanctification or inner growth, comes from Jeremiah 18:6 and Isaiah 64:8. However, neither passage has anything to do with spiritual formation. Jeremiah 18 and Romans 9 teach that God can do with Israel whatever He pleases, just like a potter with his clay. Likewise, Isaiah 64, restated, by Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:21, teaches that God makes His people for His purpose like a potter or workman (Eph. 2:10).

I have come to believe that the Bible teaches the exact opposite. Spiritual growth and sanctification are not the same thing. Sanctification is for the purpose of setting apart our lives for the glory of God. This action is completed at salvation. Paul starts off his letter, in 1 Corinthians (a church in turmoil), with this fact. He writes, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified (*past tense and completed*) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,” 1 Corinthians 1:2 (NKJV). Spiritual growth is not an inner cleansing or changing of nature (the cross completed all of that with salvation and sanctification, 1 Corinthians 6:11); however, spiritual growth is learning to act like the Christian we have become. Notice Peter writes, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,” 1 Peter 2:2. Think of growing up in salvation as a baby grows into maturity. The baby is fully established in nature as a human and set apart in belonging to a specific family, but nonetheless the child still must grow up to full maturity to be a functioning adult.

We must “be” before we can “do.” Some groups, like the Assembly of God (the denominational Bible college I attended), teach that though salvation is instantaneous, sanctification is ongoing (See Article 9 of their “Sixteen Fundamental Truths”). However, the Scriptures clearly teach that both happen at the same time. For example, Paul taught, in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified (*past tense and completed*), you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Without going into depth of what all those theological terms mean, we can clearly see, we receive them all at once! The very same day I was washed, I was also sanctified and justified.

Furthermore, there is not one “clear” mention of sanctification as an ongoing act

in all the New Testament. For the sake of space, I will address just one of the many verses used to object to complete and entire sanctification- Hebrews 10:14, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” The NET translates it, “For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are made holy.” Which one is it? Are we being made holy (ongoing) or have we been made holy (past tense). Certainly, there is much discussion on how scholars translate Greek “present passive participles” (the form of the verb, “made holy”), but is there a better way?<sup>4</sup>

For this passage’s clarity, one does not have to strive with Greek grammar, because the context, itself, clearly shows that it is in the past tense. Just a few verses above, in v. 10, the author writes in the NIV, “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The NET also agrees that the action of being made holy is past tense in the believer’s life, when they receive the sacrifice of Jesus.

We can clearly see that the passage some try to use to prove “ongoing sanctification” is actually one of the best proof passages to teach entire and completed sanctification. In this passage, Hebrews states the following, (1) v. 10, All believers have been made holy by Jesus, once and for all, by His sacrifice and (2) v. 11, All believers are made perfect by the same sacrifice. Praise God for such clarity! Much more could be written here about this subject and the many other verses that the opposition tries to assert; however, we will move on and refer the reader to, *Entire Sanctification*, by Dr. Adam Clarke.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Daniel Wallace (NET translator) notes in this article that Greek participles are very difficult to translate and grasp because of their complex usage. It is the context that truly gives them their meaning. <https://bible.org/article/participle>

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IDENTITY AND MATURITY

Let us move on to understanding the difference between identity and maturity, lest I be accused of teaching that Christians never sin; or that, if they do, they must be born again, again. Here we will learn that our identity is settled with the “once and for all” acts of salvation and sanctification, yet the ongoing work of mind renewal and behavioral transformation is what we call, “spiritual growth.”

Take for example my son, Lucas, who was born a Wyrostek in nature and now must grow up in his maturity to act like a Wyrostek. No matter what someone else’s son does, he can never be a Wyrostek in nature. To be a Wyrostek, in nature, you must be born as one. The same is true with salvation and sanctification. No one can change his or her spiritual nature to become a holy (set apart) child of God (Jeremiah 13:23). Children of God must be born of the Spirit and not “good works.” Yet, those who are born of God, those who share in the divine nature, must grow in their maturity and act in a way that is worthy of the nature they bare (Ephesians 4:1).

There is a distinct difference between nature and maturity. Nature has to do with the inner substance of being. Maturity has to do with the outer display of actions and attitudes. Spiritual growth is the work of maturity whereas, salvation and sanctification, are the work of spiritual identity. In Philippians 3:16, Paul wrote, “Let us live up to what we have already attained.” The need for spiritual growth comes from the place of finished salvation and complete sanctification that we have already attained.

In Matthew 5:48, when Jesus taught His disciples to, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” He meant it. Jesus didn’t say, “Keep trying to be



perfect.” As with 1 Corinthians 6 and deep theological terms like “sanctification,” let us not get lost in the potential meanings or applications of the concept of “perfection.”

Simply, let us choose to believe whatever the Father’s perfection entails Jesus taught that the believer is to “be” perfect. Christians should not be afraid of the word “perfect,” nor say, “nobody is perfect,” because Jesus clearly taught that the Christian (after rebirth) is to be perfect like his heavenly Father! When Peter reiterated God’s word to Moses in 1 Peter 1:16, “Be holy, because I am holy,” we see that being “holy” is what all Christians are supposed to “be”- not “try to be.” To the extent that the Father is perfect and holy, all believers are to, literally, be perfect and holy in the same, exact way. Spiritual perfection and holiness is not our future hope, by God’s amazing grace it is our current nature.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, the believer is not simply God’s clay pot that is continually being shaped into a beautiful vase as if the commands were just behavior modifications. Nor the Spirit’s mind renewal is not simply cognitive retraining as, “Think Positive!” The scandal of the gospel is that because of Jesus’ work on the cross, both salvation and sanctification happen the moment a sinner confesses Jesus as Lord. He instantly becomes a saint, spiritually alive in Christ, and made perfectly perfect and wholly holy!

### SPIRITUAL GROWTH: KNOWING, SHOWING, & GROWING

The famous spiritual growth passage of 2 Peter 1:1-11 gives a great foundation for the three major parts of spiritual growth: knowing, showing, and growing.

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<sup>5</sup> I am aware of Paul’s words in Philippians 3:12, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,” (KJV) however, this perfection is the perfect resurrected body mentioned in v. 11, “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” Hence, the reason Paul concluded his discussion of “attainment” and “perfection” with verses 15-16, “15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing,” (KJV). Paul had not attained the perfect resurrection body (“not already perfect”), but had attained spiritual perfection (“as many as be perfect”) and encouraged others to live up to that reality.

The knowing is seen in v. 3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” The showing is seen in v. 4, “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

The growing is seen in vs. 5-8, “5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Below is a chart that I believe helps illustrate the process clearly:



Let us now look at each of these three parts in-depth.

## KNOWING

According to 2 Peter 1:1-11, there are three main things that every believer should know:

(1) Jesus is God and Savior, v. 1; (2) Christians have everything they need for a godly life, v. 3 and (3) Christians partake in the divine nature, v. 4. I believe this is the “knowing” that comes from the precious faith given by Jesus. Even though faith and knowledge are different, it is good to understand what faith is and how it produces the knowledge of God in the Christian’s life.

Faith comes as a gift from God to all who willingly receive the Word of God (Ephesians 2:8 & 2 Peter 1:1). Man cannot choose faith unless God’s grace first frees his will, which is bound to the flesh because of Adam’s curse (Romans 3:10-18). Since the fall, God has graciously freed man’s will through the light of Christ (John 1:4-5), partially, in nature via the conscience (Acts 17:27-28), and, completely, through the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:17).

According to Hebrews 11:1 (KJV) faith is, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In other words, faith is the inner assurance, confirming in the believer’s soul that what God has said is true and will come to pass. Faith brings the believer into contact with God and allows him to experience His, “great and precious promises,” (1 Peter 1:4).

Hebrews 11:6 states that without faith, “it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,” (KJV). Even though we cannot produce faith on our own, once we receive it from God, we must use it to please God and seek after Him. Biblical faith is not stagnant nor mental ascent. It is perpetual movement toward God and obedience to His perfect

will.

Some have wrongly tried to pit James against Paul in their teachings on faith (ex., James 2:24 & Romans 5:1).<sup>6</sup> However, I believe Peter's writings in 2 Peter 1:1-11 can actually serve as a bridge between the two sides ("faith alone" or "faith with works"). Peter seems to acknowledge that faith alone is what saves (v. 1, "through the knowledge of God" we receive "grace and peace"). He also affirms that true faith must be accompanied by good works (vs. 5-8, "additions of faith"). Some might see this as a stretch, but I believe even without the comparison of Paul and James' writings, one could fairly argue from Peter's writings, alone, that true biblical faith is one accompanied by good works.

It is also good to note that though Peter lists knowledge as an attribute of faith, he also stated that it is through knowledge (not faith) that we receive divine power for everything we need for a godly life (v. 3). This is good to understand because Peter is already assuming his readers know the great importance of knowledge even before he lists it as an attribute of faith. In other words, faith and knowledge or "faith-based knowledge" work together as one key to unlock God's great power for godly living!

Certainly, many more things could be said from Scripture about knowing the three important things Peter lists, but for the sake of space I would just like to summarize them as questions that would be good to teach believers to know as a confessional; (1) "Do you believe and know Jesus is who He said He is?" "Yes, I believe and know Jesus is my God and Savior," (2) "Do you believe and know you have what Jesus said you

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<sup>6</sup> Luther actually doubted the book of James' inspiration and called it an, "epistle of straw," <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php/2007/04/03/six-points-on-luthers-epistle-of-straw/>

have?” “Yes, I believe and know by Jesus’ divine power I have everything I need for a godly life,” (3) “Do you believe and know you are who Jesus said you are?” “Yes, I believe and know I am a partaker in Jesus’ divine nature.”

### SHOWING

Showing, or demonstrating our faith-based knowledge is why I believe the commands of God are so important. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands.” In 1 John 2:6, John wrote, “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” For the commands to be followed, they first must be taught. Jesus gave His disciples the method by which He would teach the world His commands: “discipleship” (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, the very nature of the “godly life” Peter is referring to, in 2 Peter 1:3, is the obedient Christ-like life. John reaffirmed this in 1 John 4:17 when he wrote, “In this world we are like Jesus.”

Referring back to Peter’s words, we see that Christians can only live the “godly life” by “participating in the divine nature,” (2 Peter 1:3). So often, people in the church miss the greatness of the term, “godly,” and forget that it literally means, “to be God like.” Christians are to live like Jesus, who was (and is) God in the flesh. We are the light of the world and ought to shine with the glory of Christ for all to see His image. As much as Jesus is filled with divinity is as much as we are filled with Christ (Colossians 2:10). Paul said that we are to be filled with the whole measure of God (Ephesians 3:19). More will be said about the image of Christ later, but it is good to note here that we are called to nothing less, in our thoughts and behavior, than to live a “God-kind of life.”

Remember, Christians can live godly in their behavior because they share in God’s

nature! Also, when we believe God made us sinless, we sin less (2 Corinthians 5:21).

It is good to remember that we, as Christians, do not do good things to become a good person. We do good things because Jesus, at salvation, made us a good person. Once again, this idea is clear in Ephesians 2:10. First, we are made God's masterpiece, completely new and perfect at salvation for the kind of life He created us to live. Then, we do the good works for which we were created. God is not "working on us" like a handyman who never finishes remodeling his basement; rather, we are perfected and made holy once and for all by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 10:10,14).

As a result, following the commands of God and showing our knowledge should be a joy and not a burden. Some call the commands on my showing list, "spiritual disciplines" or "means of grace." I see merit for both terms; however, I believe it is best to simply view them as "commands." I believe the following twelve commands summarize the New Testament's expectations of every Christian.

Each one of these commands and Christian practices have been the subject of much writing; therefore, for brevity, I will just list them with a brief explanation and Scriptural basis.

1. *Bible Reading*: To read and study God's Word, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
2. *Family Order*: To be the kind of child, husband/wife, and mother/father that pleases God, Ephesians 5:21-6:4.
3. *Scripture Memorization*: To commit the Scripture to memory for the sake of knowing at all times what pleases the Lord, Psalm 119:13.
4. *Soul Journaling*: To record what God has said and done, along with your

thoughts and emotions for the sake of remembrance, Exodus 34:27.<sup>7</sup>

5. *Praying & Worshipping*: To pray and worship God in Spirit and in truth, John 4:23 & 1 Thessalonians 5:16.
6. *Discipleship & Christ-likeness*: To be a disciple, trained to live like Jesus, who makes new disciples, Matthew 28:19-20.
7. *Christian Service*: To do all things as unto the Lord- at work, at home, etc., Colossians 3:17.
8. *Public Evangelism*: To preach the gospel with signs following to strangers in public settings, Mark 16:15;20.
9. *Spiritual Meditation*: To mentally focus on the Word of God in the presence of the Lord, Psalm 1:2.
10. *Financial Stewardship*: To manage one's money according to the Word of God, 2 Corinthians 8:7.
11. *Christian Fellowship*: To be friends with godly people and share life together, Proverbs 13:10.
12. *Church Involvement*: To work and serve in ministry, Ephesians 4:11-12.

I would recommend that a church teach these practices to their people, from the pulpit, in small groups, and discipleship programs.

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<sup>7</sup> I willfully acknowledge that, "soul journaling" is the least easily seen command in the Bible. However, I believe it is the very command that gave us the Bible. Meaning, men wrote and faithfully handed down what God said to them and we should do the same. Also, the commands to sing songs with all wisdom and admonishment (Colossians 3:16) can be seen in the book of "Songs/Psalms." To someone who cannot read or write, I would say that they should do this in the form of "detailed remembering," Deuteronomy 8:2.

## GROWING

In the last stage of spiritual growth, the actual transformation of behavior and renewal of the mind takes place. The purpose of such growth is to reflect the image of God. Paul wrote, in Colossians 3:9-10, “9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” Therefore, the behavioral change from lying to telling the truth is based in the fact that the “old self” has gone and the “new self” has come through salvation and sanctification. The renewal happens through knowing the Creator more and more. In other words, the more a believer knows God, the more he can grow and reflect God.

In a similar passage, Paul wrote, in Ephesians 4:22-24, “22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Here we see that the new self was created (past tense) to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. We literally “put off” or “take off” the old self (i.e., “the flesh”) by being born again. The flesh becomes a slave to our new spiritual life.

The believer is not both a sinner and a saint. He is not “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He is altogether, a sanctified saint (1 Corinthians 1:2). As a saint living the new life, he is to continually be renewed in his knowledge of his true identity.

This identity is the same image that was given to Adam and Eve at creation. It is the very image made for maturing in the divine nature, with a perfect spiritual soul. This spiritual soul shines through the body of flesh until the second coming of Christ, when



it will be given a resurrected body, like that of Jesus when He was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:42). This is why Paul called Jesus, “the first born among the dead,” in Colossians 1:18. Jesus displayed our hope for the world to come! Today, our spiritual soul is a precious treasure in a jar of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7) and a light on a hill that must shine for all to see (Matthew 5:14).

Though Peter, in 2 Peter 1, gave his readers definite instructions on how to mature in their Christianity, he did not give the whole list found in Scripture. As a result, I have added Paul’s list, in Galatians 5, known as the “fruit of the Spirit” by simply combining the two lists and removing any repeats. Hence, we are left with twelve unique ways the Christian should grow to fully reflect Jesus’ character.

Remember, from Peter’s words about the godly life, that the areas where we need to mature will not happen with human effort alone. Our spiritual growth must come from faith, by knowing God; and, then we must be willing to show it, by the Spirit, and live an obedient life. When we know and show our love for God, we will grow in our faith. Take for example, marriage. The more a husband knows his wife’s desires and fulfills them by his love, the more he will grow in his love for her, in his goodness, and in his desire to know her more! Imagine a child who truly knows and shows his love for his parents. He will see his good fruit in their lives and desire to know and love them more!

No one can grow in any of the things listed on the growth side of the chart unless they, first, know God and show it by obedience. In other words, if someone says he wants to grow in goodness, but does not have faith that Jesus is the Son of God, and show his faith by obeying His commands, his goodness is always like filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). Biblically, the goodness that God desires comes from knowing and

showing, according to the truth found in the Scriptures.

Likewise, if someone wants to grow in self-control, but doesn't do so by knowing and showing their love for God in obedience to His commands, he only shows that he can exert limited control over some of his habits and fails to show true self-control over his self-centered desires. His control of self is derived from self, thus it is selfish or self-centered. This is why Jesus' first command to His disciples is to deny one's self (Matthew 16:24). The self-centered person has not made his flesh his slave, but is, in fact, still a slave to his flesh and under its control. His flesh desires to find a way to control without yielding to Jesus as its Master. To experience spiritual growth, one must look outside themselves, to Jesus, and grow via the Holy Spirit.

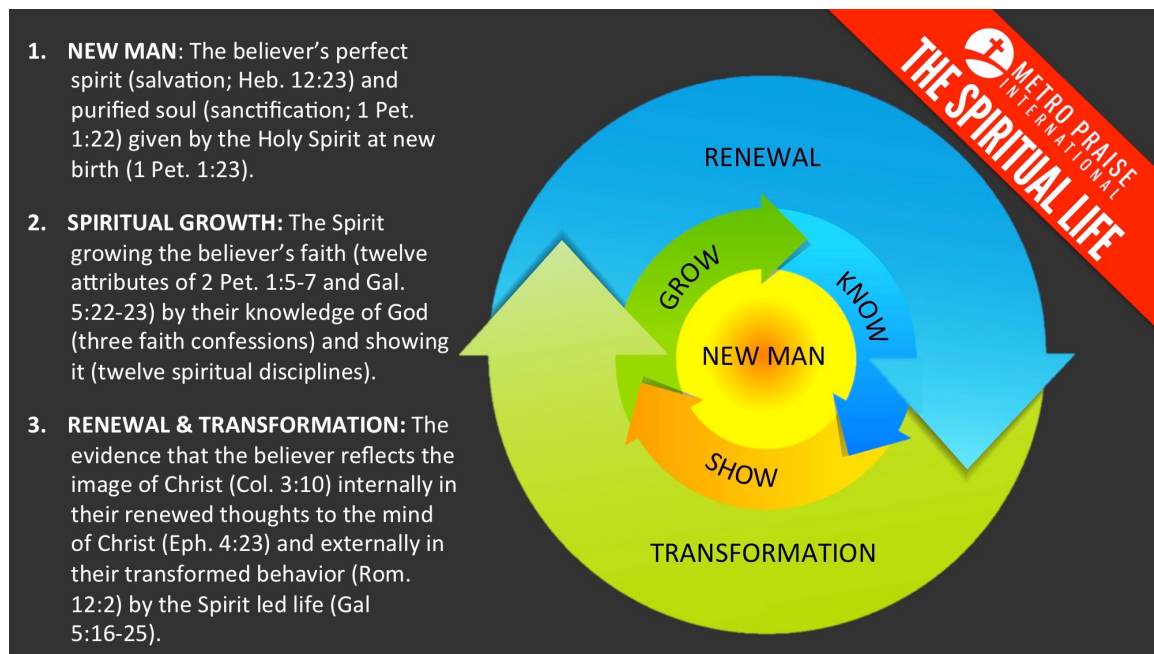
Let us now look over the spiritual growth list with a scriptural example for each one:

1. *Goodness*: To follow the commands found in Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit in one's daily life, 2 Thessalonians 2:11.
2. *Knowledge*: To learn more about God, one's identity, and the perfect will of God through the Bible and personal experience confirmed with Scripture, 2 Peter 3:18.
3. *Self-Control*: To live free from all sinful, fleshy desires, 2 Timothy 1:7.
4. *Perseverance*: To never give up on the things of God, Galatians 6:9.
5. *Godliness*: To live like God in all situations, 1 Timothy 4:8.
6. *Mutual Affection*: To love one's neighbor as one's self, Mark 12:31.
7. *Love*: To display the character of God in self-sacrifice and strong positive interpersonal emotion, John 15:13.

8. *Joy*: To be filled with inner happiness and contentment, Philippians 4:4.
9. *Peace*: To be free from inner turmoil, Philippians 4:7.
10. *Patience*: To suffer long with a good attitude and trust in God's will, Romans 12:12.
11. *Kindness*: To treat others with compassion, Colossians 3:12.
12. *Gentleness*: To be humble with both God and man, Philippians 4:5.

### CLOSING: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

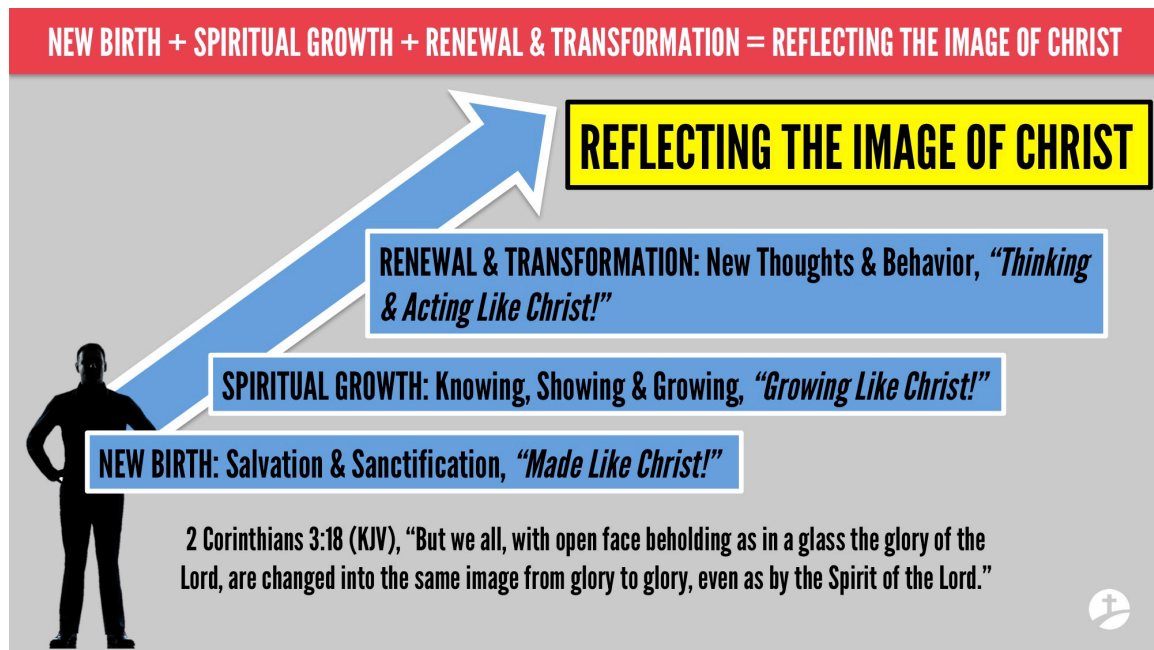
Below are two charts that give great application and understanding about spiritual growth. We see, in the first chart below, that spiritual growth is the ongoing cycle in the spiritual life that connects the new man to renewal and transformation.



Renewal and transformation are defined, in Romans 12:2, as new behaviors and thoughts. Paul does infer to a transformation of nature in 2 Corinthians 3:16 that is from “glory to glory,” but we will see that better displayed in the next chart. The above chart

summarizes well, with its three main points on the left, how the growing and transforming spiritual life looks. Basically, the spiritual life is a new, perfect, and purified soul growing in Christ's character through knowing and showing. As a result, the mind is renewed and one's behavior is transformed.

The final chart shows how Christians go from "glory to glory" to reflect the image of Christ more and more.



New birth makes Christians like Christ. Spiritual growth is Christians growing in wisdom and stature as Jesus did. A growing Christian will think and act like Jesus and so reflect the image of Christ.

In closing, the three thoughts I would like to leave with you are as follows: First, let us remember who we are in regard to our spiritual nature at salvation. Do not base your opinion of yourself simply on your feelings or actions. Trust God's Word that you are who He said you are and can do what He said you can do.

Second, take the approach to spiritual growth that Peter, Paul, and Jesus did (along with other biblical authors). It is the approach that doesn't look to become or grow to be holy, but rather grow because you are holy. The simple steps of knowing, showing, and growing will assist you well as you desire to reflect Jesus.

Last, let renewal and transformation happen naturally as you intentionally grow up in your salvation. By truly knowing who you are in Christ, and focusing on intentional growth, you will naturally be renewed in your mind and changed by the Spirit of God in your actions. When I was saved over 20 years ago, I did not stop smoking, because I tried mind-over-matter discipline techniques. As I intentionally learned to walk with the Spirit, however, I grew naturally in self-control and overcame the carnal desire to smoke.

I also haven't looked at pornography in almost 20 years. My behavior, in that regard, was naturally changed, as I intentionally focused my faith on learning who Jesus was and who He made me to be. As I was obedient to Jesus' commands, I was changed in my mind and behavior. His thoughts became my thoughts and my body (like how Paul taught) became my slave unto the perfect will of God (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Dear saint, I leave you with the words of Paul to inspire you to be all that God made you to be: "Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more practical insight, please visit my church's website to see the sermon series I preached on this subject, with the notes and charts included: <http://mpichurch.org/category/spiritual-growth-series/>