

Christian Growth.

Text: Heb 13:1-9

Suggested Hymns:

326, 304, 238T237v, 293, 383

1) Grow In Faith In Jesus

2) Grow In Trust In God's Providence

3) Grow In Love Toward Our Fellow Men

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 13:1-9, ¹ *Let brotherly love continue.* ² *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* ³ *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them — those who are mistreated — since you yourselves are in the body also.*

⁴ *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

⁵ *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

⁶ *So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

⁷ *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.* ⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.* ⁹ *Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Each time we attend the Lord's Supper we confess our sins, ask God's forgiveness for Christ's sake, and promise to amend our sinful lives.

This is a very general promise, and I fear that often it does not mean much to us because we do not think of any particular respects in which we will improve our Christian lives.

For that matter, Christian growth in grace is pledged each Sunday, in the Service without Communion, when we ask God to help us to increase in “*true obedience to Thy Word.*”

Obedience to His Word includes the whole of the Christian life. In a general way we desire to grow into the likeness of Christ, but often we do not think of particular requirements of the Word of God which would apply to particular weaknesses of ours.

Jesus suggests that every Christian ought to grow spiritually when He compares us to a kernel of corn, which first sprouts, then shoots forth ears, and then develops the full corn.

St. Peter also speaks of Christian growth when he says in 2 Peter 3:18, ¹⁸ *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* St. Paul also treats of this same subject when he writes to the Ephesians, “*speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ.*”¹

Christian growth, then, must come about through a more complete knowledge of what Christ was, a better understanding of God’s Word, and a willingness to apply it to our lives in every detail, not in just a general way.

It is of some of these details that the writer to the Hebrews speaks in the closing chapter of his Letter. Let us consider *Christian Growth*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Grow In Faith In Jesus

In order to grow at all, we must grow in faith in Jesus. Faith is growing constantly — either weaker or stronger. Jesus frequently rebuked His disciples for their weak faith. On the Sea of Galilee, in the midst of the storm, He reprimanded them saying, “*Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?*”² He expected their faith to be strong.

The author of Hebrews also speaks of Jesus as the Centre of our faith when he says in the text ⁷ *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.* ⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

We are to follow or imitate the faith of the staunch Christians who have gone on before. He mentions especially the ministers who have spoken the Word of

God. Of all men they have perhaps the best opportunity of growing strong in the faith. They spend much of their time studying the Word of God when they prepare for the ministry.

They are occupied with it in sermon preparation, Confirmation classes, and in applying the Scriptures to the lives of individual people. God gives us such men that they may be our leaders in spiritual things. The words translated, *“those who rule over you”* are really better rendered: “who are your leaders.”

St. Paul speaks particularly of those who have died for the faith when he says, *“considering the outcome of their conduct.”* Their *“conduct”* was their way of life. Jesus was very real to them as the Saviour from sin. For Him they lived, and for Him many of them died. Undoubtedly Paul was thinking of some of the early martyrs. Their faith was weak at first, too, but it grew to be so strong that they were willing to die rather than deny their Saviour.

That same Redeemer in whom they trusted lives today and is able to save us to the uttermost and will be the only Saviour forever. As time rolls by we ought not stand still in the faith, but from year to year grow stronger in the conviction that the Son of God, who gave His life for the sins of the world and who ascended up into heaven to rule over all things, is the only Hope of mankind.

One who is strong in the faith, will not be easily misled by false teachings. *⁹Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.*

The Hebrews were troubled with many false teachers, especially those who tried to drag them back under the old Ceremonial Law. These wanted to make the chief concern of the Jewish Christians the question of meats, which they should not eat, and of other Old Testament practices.

The Jewish Christians were often bewildered about what they should believe, because their hearts were not sufficiently established in Christ and in the doctrine of the grace of God. So the holy writer urges them to grow in their convictions of the truth so that they would not be confused and driven from pillar to post in their beliefs.

We, today, are also bombarded on every side with peculiar notions which ignorant or self-willed people have developed and which do not agree with the

Scriptures. Those who do not know their Bibles, who have not grown strong on the sincere milk of the Word, are likewise bewildered.

When a person from the many sects around today speaks to them, they think it sounds good. If a liberal pastor presents his views, they also sound logical.

The final outcome is often that such a person says: *“It doesn’t make much difference what one believes, so long as one tries to do the right thing.”*

St. Paul’s plea is just as urgent today. Do not be carried about by every wind of doctrine, but let your faith in Jesus as the only Saviour be so strong that, like the martyrs, you would be willing to die for it.

2. Grow In Trust In God’s Providence

Our Christian religion affects not only our spiritual estate or the life that is to come. St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8, ***⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.***

The Letter to the Hebrews is concerned also about the life that now is. Your faith in Christ is a blessing to you, not just in the hour of sickness or death, when there is some spiritual crisis involved, but in the everyday affairs of your life.

This strength comes from our text, ***For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” ⁶ So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”***

God is concerned about our life in the body, in this world, and He knows that by nature we are inclined to worry about how to provide for all things needful.

When we have become His children in Christ, He promises, as our heavenly Father, to provide for every need. We read in Philippians 4:19, ***¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.***

We do not always see the means to secure the things which we think we need. The Christian walks by faith and not by sight. We must grow strong in our confidence in His promise, ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”***

To have little or no faith in this word of His is a sin. When we promise to amend our sinful lives, we agree that with the help of His Holy Spirit we will overcome this sin, too, and trust Him more fully. When we do this, covetousness

will gradually leave our hearts. Our text says, ⁵ *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.*

We shall no longer say: “*A little more, a little more, I want as much as the richest friend I have.*” Rather we shall say: “*Whether God gives me much or little depends upon His grace and good will. I will be content and leave it to Him to supply my needs as He sees fit.*” Such a one has grown strong in his trust in God’s providence.

3. Grow In Love Toward Our Fellow Men

The third step in Christian growth is perhaps a more difficult one to take. It affects our relationship to our fellow men. “¹ *Let brotherly love continue,*” we read.

The holy writer takes it for granted that it has begun, and he knows that because of the weakness of our flesh it may wither away. Therefore he reminds us to nurture it and to cultivate it that it may continue to grow.

In general, I suppose, we are all agreed that brotherly love is a necessary Christian virtue. When we begin to notice a few of the detailed aspects of it, we may realise that we have not grown much in the practice of it. ² *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* Such was the case with Abraham in Genesis 18:3, and Lot in Genesis 19:2.

When these words were written, there were few inns or hotels. Strangers depended upon the hospitality of people living along the road. It was not unusual to have a total stranger knock at the door and ask for food and lodging. This does not often happen to us today, but the admonition to show hospitality still applies.

When strangers come to church they, too, are knocking at our doors, asking for lodging in our midst. Do you think they always go away feeling that they are wanted?

A woman visited a church a number of times but was never made to feel welcome by the members. She was lonely and wanted some fellowship but couldn’t seem to get it. Finally, at one of the services, the minister discussed the question: “*Shall we know one another in heaven?*”

Upon arriving home, she wrote a short note to the minister, saying: *“In spite of your convincing sermon last Sunday I don’t see how we can know one another in heaven if we don’t even want to know one another here on earth.”* She had a point.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, ²⁸ ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

We must make sure that we do not hinder strangers from coming again with an attitude of indifference. Under certain circumstances we might heed the Apostle’s admonition to entertain strangers by inviting them to our homes, where they will have opportunity to become more intimately acquainted with us.

Our world is highly institutionalised today. Many strangers who need our love are in hospitals, aged care, institutions for the blind, etc. Some of them are strangers indeed in that they have no friends who ever visit them.

Remember the words of our Lord: ***“I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. ... inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”***³

Some of us are working and would have no opportunity for this kind of social service. Perhaps the best we can do is to support a Christian organisation which sends trained workers to visit strangers in distress. We know that the Gideons visit people in prisons.

There is a distinct blessing in this kind of Christian service. The text reminds us that in entertaining strangers some have entertained angels unawares.

Abraham, on one occasion thought that he was just entertaining three men but later discovered that they were angels in disguise, who left behind them one of the greatest blessings ever given to man, the promise that the Saviour of the world would be born of his seed.

God still promises to bestow His richest blessing upon Christian charity that is shown to those who are in any need, whether physical or spiritual.

May we who weekly promise to amend our sinful lives, be specific about what we say and, constantly becoming stronger in faith in Christ, in trust in God, and in love to our fellow men, ***“grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ.”*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Ephesians 4:15

² Matthew 8:26

³ Matthew 25:35-40