

THE SAVIOR AND HOW TO GROW IN HIS GRACE
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"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Ambition is one of the most compelling forces in existence. Webster's Dictionary defines it as "An eager and sometimes inordinate desire for something, as preferment, honor, superiority, power, fame, wealth, etc. The desire to distinguish oneself in some way." It is the motivating force which ignores failure, overcomes weakness, and persists until a desired goal is reached. Ask an athlete about his ambition and he will probably express a desire to become the greatest in his profession. A politician wistfully dreams of becoming the president of his country. A young bank clerk may wish to become a successful financier. A medical student may want to become a famous surgeon with his own hospital. An old Christian was asked about his greatest desire, and after reflection, he replied, "I have three great yearnings: to be found in Christ, to be like Christ, and to be with Christ." Had he given greater consideration to the question, he might have added three others, for the Bible reveals six steps that lead to a golden throne.

Desiring Christ... Sincerity... An Undeniable Plea

"And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:20-21). Nothing of spiritual value can be done for anyone until he becomes aware of his need to meet Christ. God may supply a banquet, but if the guests refuse to eat what has been supplied, nothing more can be done. The Savior walked through the streets of Jericho, but if the blind beggar had remained silent, he would not have received sight. Multitudes of people attended the feast at Jerusalem, and many might have been interested in meeting Christ. The Greeks did not walk aimlessly around the streets; they found a man who could introduce them to Jesus and asked for assistance. God said, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17). Solomon realized that knowing God was of paramount importance; it was not something to be postponed until a more convenient time. To find the Lord should be man's greatest desire. The Greeks who came to Jerusalem were consumed with a passionate longing to meet the Man from Galilee,

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and their eyes shone with pleasure when their dreams were fulfilled. The prospectors who panned for gold in the mountain streams of California seldom abandoned their search for the precious metal. When seekers after Christ exhibit that kind of determination, they succeed. David said, "Blessed are they... that seek him with the whole heart" (Ps. 119:2).

In Christ... Salvation... A Unique Position

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). It is important to know that men may be attracted to Christ, may listen to His Word and even admire Him, and yet not be His disciples. To belong to a listening audience is one thing, to worship at His feet is another.

The term "in Christ" was one of Paul's favorite expressions. The apostle probably seldom, if ever, asked to what church a believer belonged. He taught that fellowship with other Christians was desirable and spent the greater part of his life establishing assemblies where Christians could worship together. Yet, when he referred to his associates, he said they were "in Christ." For example, he spoke

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of "Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:7). The same statement or definition appears in several places throughout his epistles. To be "in Christ" means that His presence and power encircle the saint. Something has happened. Those who were outside are now inside! It speaks of identification. Men and women have entered into His grace and fellowship.

Sheep that are within the fold of the shepherd can depend upon his care; they each belong to the other. To be "in Christ" means acceptance by Him; He is pleased to be associated with us. When Adam accepted and put on the garment of skins which God supplied in the garden of Eden, human nakedness was covered. When believers put on the garments of salvation (see Isa 61:10), God sees not their insufficiency, but the righteousness of Christ by which they are clothed. To be "in Christ" means that God has accepted them as His children. His love overshadows their sin; His grace removes their shame. They are in Christ, and that is a unique position. It is not known whether the Greeks who sought to see Jesus ever reached this stage on the royal highway to heaven, but for those who love and serve Him, Christ said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto

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them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

For Christ... Service... An Unashamed Profession

"And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49-50). It would be interesting to know more about the mysterious man who was rebuked by the Lord's disciples. Evidently he had heard the Savior and his life had been influenced by the power of God. He apparently left his occupation to become an evangelist. For undisclosed reasons the new preacher chose not to be identified with the apostles. He decided to be independent, and his activities caused concern among the disciples. Whether John became jealous of the stranger's success or shocked by his independence is not known. The apostle and his colleagues watched the man's exploits but disliked the fact that he did not belong to their company. He was a stranger who had never been commissioned to evangelize the villages. They urged him to cease preaching, but it is doubtful that he obeyed their instructions.

Modern critics would say he did not belong to the authorized convention! He should remain silent, for the elders' hands had not been placed upon his head! This was the first appearance of denominational superiority among the followers of Jesus. Unfortunately, it was not the last. The man was definitely casting out devils; therefore it must be concluded he was a genuine exorcist. His success was achieved through his faith in the name of Jesus. It is difficult to believe he was trying to increase his popularity or that he suffered from an inflated ego. Had his motives for service been insincere, the demons would have exposed his hypocrisy (compare Acts 19:13-16).

Jesus was not surprised by John's announcement. He said, "He that is not against us, is for us." The Lord is far more important than any group of believers who claim to be associated with Him. Unfortunately, prejudice has made it difficult for some people to discern that fact. When we love the Lord, we serve—any other course of action would be unpardonable.

Through Christ... Success ... An Unlimited Power

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to

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be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:12-13). No person did more for the extension of Christ's kingdom than Paul. Within his lifetime he evangelized the world of his day, he continued his work in spite of great hazards, and finally, when he reached journey's end, he said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:6-8). Paul desired others to know that victory came through Christ; it was not the result of self-effort, nor because he was too proud to admit defeat.

The story of Paul's amazing exploits provides exciting reading. For he triumphed where other men would have failed. He was an untiring missionary who continued his work until he was killed in Rome. He refused to quit. When difficulties loomed as mountains ahead, he either climbed or went around them, but he never turned back. He had placed his hand to the plow and was determined to complete his God-given task. The reason for his success was explained clearly in his epistles. He believed the risen Lord lived in the souls of all who had become temples of the Holy Spirit. Writing to the church in Corinth, he said, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

Paul believed that when he was united with God's Holy Spirit, no difficulty was insurmountable and no problem insoluble. Occasionally, as in the prison in Jerusalem, he became despondent, but even there the Lord renewed the promise that Paul would preach before Caesar (see Acts 23:11). Together they faced every trial, shared each emotion. When Paul sent his message to the church in Philippi, he emphasized that everything was possible through Christ—who presented with him Christians should never forget this important fact.

Like Christ... Sanctification... An Unspoiled Purity

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The followers of Christ were first called disciples. The word, or name, was a translation of *matheetes* which meant a pupil or stu-

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dent. Eminent philosophers walked through the countryside, teaching as they went. Their students accompanied them and listened to the lesson as it was given. Similarly, the disciples of Jesus followed Him and learned as they walked. Evidently they were attentive scholars, for the words of the Savior were reproduced in the Gospels. John and his colleagues were called disciples. With the passing of time that word became unsatisfactory. The listeners had become like their Teacher! This was recognized in the city of Antioch. Luke wrote, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

As the church grew in grace and size, watching citizens recognized the members were different from their unconverted neighbors. They lived according to standards of morality undesired by other people. John expressed that fact when he wrote, "He that saith he abideth in him [Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). Paul expressed a similar truth when he wrote of growing from a child to become a mature adult, of desiring the meat of the word instead of milk (see Eph. 4:15; 1 Cor. 3:2). Every Christian should earnestly strive to be like Christ. That goal will

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ultimately be reached, for John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The most effective advertisement for Christ is a dedicated, sanctified life. The Holy Spirit was sent to the church to transform sinners into saints. That He succeeded in Antioch became evident, for the citizens of that city believed the name "disciples" did not reflect the character of the people in their midst. The followers of Christ had become like their Lord—they were all little Christs!—they were Christians. Any believer who has no ambition to emulate that example is an enigma.

With Christ... Serenity... An Unceasing Pleasure

The intensity of Paul's love for Christ may be detected in his statement to the church at Philippi. He wrote, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23-24). In spite of blemishes this world is a place no one wishes to leave—unless continuing pain has made existence unbearable. No person wants to die—unless something has destroyed

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the desire to live. Paul was a notable exception to that rule. His reasons for wanting to live and continue his service for Christ were unmistakable. Yet when he contrasted the pleasure of serving Christ on earth and abiding in His presence in heaven, the apostle knew which was more desirable. He could not imagine anything that would supersede the thrill of seeing his Lord and remaining in His presence forever. That was the ultimate joy.

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul said, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Some day my earthly house will fall,
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be;
But this I know—My All in All
Has now a place in heav'n for me.

And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story—Saved by grace.

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