

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

It's Time to Grow Up

by Jim Rector

It is a sad story, but many of God's own people are guilty of taking their very calling for granted. Today, so long removed from the days of Christ and the early apostolic fire and zeal, far too many Christians put their faith not in God, but in men and things of the flesh. Church organizations, in their lust for power and control over people, have stifled true spiritual growth and service. It is high time that we wake up to the true goals of this special calling we have mercifully received. This article will help you gauge your own standing in the things of God and hopefully urge all of us to realize that it is time to finally GROW UP!

What is your real goal in life? I don't mean the ultimate goal of being in the Kingdom of God or an immediate short-range goal like mowing the lawn or planting a garden. I'm talking about your very reason for drawing breath today, right now! I am not referring to what SHOULD be your goal, but what actually is. You will have to answer that question for yourself, but I caution you to be perfectly honest when you do. Otherwise your mind will fool you and will play tricks on you and cause you to assume that things are okay spiritually, when indeed they may not be!

The goal of every Christian should be, quite simply, to GROW UP--grow up to the full stature of Jesus (Yahshua) Christ our Saviour. In Hebrews 5, the apostle Paul penned a strong admonition that we all ought to take to heart today. He said:

"Though he (Christ) were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being MADE PERFECT (mature, whole), he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him...Of whom we have many things to say and hard to be uttered, seeing you are DULL OF HEARING. For the time you ought to be TEACHERS, you have need that one teach you again what be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a BABE. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of USE have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:8-14).

Our Savior and mentor, Jesus Christ, set the perfect example for us--an example that we are bound to emulate and follow. Though he was the very Son of God, he still had to learn the hard lessons of this life and calling through the many trials and sufferings he experienced. He GREW UP spiritually until he was a mature, aged, tried and tested Son. In like manner, so must we!

THE MIND OF CHRIST

On the fateful night of his betrayal and arrest, the Messiah told his disciples:

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that it may abide with you forever; EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH: whom the world cannot receive, because it sees it not, neither knows it, but you know it, for it DWELLS WITH YOU, and shall be IN YOU" (John 14:16-17).

The Holy Spirit is the very power of Yahweh, the Father in heaven. It is the Spirit with which He created the universe (Gen. 1:1-3). As the psalmist wrote: "You hide Your face, they are troubled. You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth YOUR SPIRIT, they are CREATED; and you renew the face of the earth" (Psa. 104:29-30). This Spirit literally pervades the entire chasm of space and is an integral part of all that exists. Indeed David once confessed: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. WHERE SHALL I GO FROM YOUR SPIRIT? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?" (Psa. 139:6-7).

Unfortunately Satan the devil has corrupted the truth concerning the nature of the Holy Spirit. He has, in fact, deceived the entire world on this most crucial point. How? By successfully promulgating the false concept of a triune or tripartite Godhead—a God in three equal persons with one of the individuals being the Holy Spirit. This doctrine of the trinity is absolutely sacrosanct to virtually every professing, ostensible Christian church, denomination and sect throughout the world. But long ago, prior to the dawn of Christianity, the notion of the trinity could be found in pagan religions from one end of the earth to the other!

As I have stated before, is it just possible that Satan, having been cast down by God after his thwarted rebellion (Isa. 14, Ezek. 28), having been stripped bare of his former greatness and glory, has now twisted the original truth and subtly, deceitfully palmed himself off as the Holy Spirit—turning it into an literal entity—a third member of the very Godhead??? After all, it was Lucifer's primary desire to ascend to the throne of God, to be like the Most High (Isa. 14:13-14).. When his dreams of power were utterly crushed, was he so enraged that he began distorting man's very perception of God and, by doing so, actually succeeded in discreetly interjecting himself as a third member of the Deity? Think about it! We already know that the Holy Spirit is the revealer of all truth (John 16:13). Remember, if you will, that Satan's very name was originally *Lucifer*, which is derived from the Latin. The actual Hebrew, however, was *Heylel* and means *the morning star, the light bringer!* How devious, how ingenious, how insidious! How far has Satan really gone in his wretched scheme to deceive the whole world?

The Holy Spirit is unequivocally NOT a third person or separate being. The Godhead is presently composed of two entities, NOT THREE--God the Father and His Son. Human beings, however, have the unparalleled opportunity to be born of the Holy Spirit and actually become a part of the Deity, joining God Himself as His divine children! The incredible truth of this fascinating and unique plan of God has been distorted and hidden and consequently counterfeited by Satan the devil.

The spirit of man is that non-physical essence that comprises his mind, allowing him to operate above and beyond mere brain power. The Spirit of God is the MIND OF GOD, not some indefinable, vague third person. It is the POWER of God, as Christ told the disciples: "But you shall receive POWER after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

We know that Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). In other words, he was completely imbued with that special spiritual power--the power by which God was able to live and act through him. We, on the other hand, are granted only a certain small portion of the Spirit. Paul wrote: "Now he that has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who has also given unto us the EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT" (II Cor. 5:5). As we know, the word *earnest* is merely an antiquated term for down payment or deposit--something that is put down as a sign of promise or good faith. In other words, God the Father has given us a small amount of His own spiritual essence, His own spiritual power, that can then be increased in us as we yield to and

serve Him, as we USE and exercise that power. Ultimately, God has promised to give us eternal life through this very same Spirit that dwells within us" (Rom. 8:11).

The Holy Spirit is not only the power of God, it is the essence of His very mind. It is therefore able to convey to us the attributes of the Father in heaven. Paul wrote Timothy: "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of POWER, and of LOVE, and of a SOUND MIND" (II Tim. 1:7). Indeed, the chief characteristic of God is love (Gk. *agape*), and this should and must be the true identifying sign of human beings who have the Holy Spirit. Paul states that "**the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit**" (Rom. 5:6). The Spirit consequently is able to impart to our minds some of the very thought processes of God Himself--His attitude, His approach, His state of mind. It is, in fact, the essential tool absolutely necessary for SPIRITUAL GROWTH!

GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

Paul puts the whole issue of spiritual growth in perspective when he shows that God's purpose is that:

"We all come unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, and unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more CHILDREN, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine...but speaking the truth in love, may GROW UP unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:13-15).

We all start out in our spiritual lives just like we do in our physical lives--as little babies! But we cannot afford to remain in that state. We are designed to grow spiritually. Notice Peter's admonition:

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. Like NEWBORN BABES, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may GROW UP in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good...you also, like living stones, are being BUILT into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:1-2, 5).

Paul expanded on this same theme in his letter to the Ephesians by saying:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

So we see that God starts us out on the milk of the Word, but He expects us to grow up, to progress on to a diet of strong meat. The Corinthian church experienced many problems in this area, prompting Paul to lecture them on the subject of spiritual growth. Please take note of his important message:

"Don't be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent babies when it comes to planning evil, but be men of intelligence in understanding matters of this kind...I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly--MERE INFANTS IN CHRIST" (I Cor. 14:20; 3:1-3).

Spiritual life is like physical life. One is a type of the other. Both must be exercised, energized, nourished and made productive, else they become useless and ineffective. To help us begin the process of spiritual growth, of being built up in the faith, Christ has called and gifted some who serve, in a sense, as spiritual parents, teachers and examples. But just as any growing child becomes stronger, surer and more independent, so Christians are expected to, step by step, grow to the point that they can stand on their own spiritual feet! The Holy Spirit then becomes the ultimate Teacher of truth. Paul said:

"But God has revealed them (spiritual truths) unto us BY HIS SPIRIT: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God ...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God...But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST" (I Cor. 2:10-16).

As we walk with God, as we yield and submit to Him, as we begin to put Him first and foremost in our lives, He begins to reveal to our minds more and more of His truth. Paul taught the Romans that Christians:

"Are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. For if you live after the flesh, you shall die; but if you through the Spirit do mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear...The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:13-16).

God's Spirit is an energizing power, a transforming force! Paul again said: "Be not conformed to the world, but be you TRANSFORMED by the RENEWING OF YOUR MIND" (Rom. 12:2). We cannot stagnate, we cannot stultify. We absolutely must grow in Christ. Paul described this objective by saying: "Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). He spoke to the Ephesians about being "renewed in the Spirit of your mind" (Eph. 4:23); and putting on the "NEW MAN" (Eph. 4:24). And he emphatically told the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

As we diligently follow the commands that God has given us, we progress more and more in our ability to learn and comprehend the will and word of God. We need teachers less and less as we continue in the growth pattern. This is only natural, if we are allowed to grow properly. Often, however, church organizations get in the way of true spiritual growth by imposing controls over their members. This is diametrically opposite to the way God intends His children to be treated. As Hebrews 6:1 clearly states: "Therefore leaving the principles (basic milk of the Word) of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection (a fully grown and mature Christian).

The apostle John commented on this subject by saying:

"Let that therefore abide in you (Holy Spirit), which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you (false teachers). But the ANOINTING (Gk. charisma - an endowment of the Holy Spirit) which you have received of him abides in you, and YOU NEED NOT THAT ANY MAN TEACH YOU: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him" (I John 2:27).

Let's not misapply this passage of Scripture. John is not meaning to say here that we can all just go off on our own and establish doctrine for ourselves. He is not meaning to claim that we may never have need of teachers. He is, on the other hand, very simply stating precisely what we have been reading from the letters of Peter and Paul and, indeed, Christ himself--namely, that each Christian should be using the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that as he grows in grace and knowledge, in experience gained, in the study of God's Word, the less and less need he will have for TOTAL DEPENDENCE upon others to always teach him everything. We all can and should use the Holy Spirit to stand up and walk on our own spiritual feet--to labor and become fruitful in our spiritual lives. That is exactly what Christ and the apostles understood the calling and responsibility of a Christian to be.

Brethren, we must come to understand and believe that just as the mind of God is absolutely without limitation, so also is our own growth by and through that Spirit UNLIMITED as well!! It is we who tend to quench the Spirit! It is we who tend to grieve the Spirit! It is we who tend to thwart the purposes of the Spirit! In other words, WE are the limiting factor in our spiritual progress. What we all need to do is to strip off the things that stand in our way, that get between us and our God, and put them out of our lives, mortify them, overcome them. And we have the power to do precisely that very thing!

Jude gives us some awfully good advice that I am certain we often take far too much for granted. He said:

"But you, dear friends, must BUILD UP YOUR LIVES even more strongly upon the foundation of our holy faith, LEARNING TO PRAY in the power and strength of the HOLY SPIRIT" (Jude 20).

Consistent, genuine, heartfelt and fervent prayer must occupy the preeminent position in our lives every single day - WITHOUT FAIL!!! Yes, I know that we all have heard this principle

before and we all would quickly acknowledge its importance. But it is just this kind of very basic tool that we tend to neglect, de-emphasize or do half-heartedly in our busy lives. We take it for granted. Our prayers tend to become less intense, less direct, less motivated, less connected, less effective. And yet this kind of daily communication with God is the most vital contact we have with our invisible Heavenly Father.

Furthermore, prayer is not just getting down on our knees at certain times during the day. Prayer is simply talking with God. And while it certainly includes those regular formal prayer sessions, it also embraces our complete state of mind vis-a-vis God. Prayer is more than just officially petitioning God each morning before going off to work or each night before retiring. It also has to do with the depth and reality of our overall connection with God.

Put prayer **FIRST** in your life! That should be plain and simple enough. Remember that whatever we put first **ALWAYS GETS DONE!** Pray whether you think you have the time or not (Our priority is to be about our Father's business, not our own!). Pray with all your heart, talking to God as if He truly were your Father, indeed as a little child beseeches his or her own human father. Don't hold anything back, including problems, trials, hidden sins, unpleasant weaknesses, dreaded situations, guilt, the deepest issues of life, the most bitter tears of sorrow and grief or those of happiness and joy. Totally unburden yourself to God. Speak with real meaning and intensity. Pray **OUT LOUD** as much as possible, even as David often did. It is so easy for prayer to be a mere exercise, a routine, something that we do as if we were on automatic pilot. Brethren, our prayers to God and our experience with God must truly be **REAL**, otherwise we are only fooling ourselves. Pray as if your very life were on the line.

If God walked in one day and sat down beside you as you were praying, I guarantee that you would approach your chance to talk with Him precisely as you should - with all the awe, the worshipful attitude, the sincere words of praise and thanks. You would come clean with Him then, would you not? You would speak with great feeling and intensity. You would be excited and overjoyed. Your problems would pale into insignificance! You would consider such an occasion an opportunity of a lifetime! Do you see what I mean? Just how real is God, after all? Does He really have to appear and sit down beside us in the flesh? Please consider carefully your own prayer life and your own true connection with God. Measure and weigh it and know where you stand.

Prayer must be mixed with diligent Bible study for a Christian to really grow spiritually. Once again, I realize that this is almost too basic to mention, but at the cost of sounding too simplistic, I will anyway. Remember Paul's effusive commendation of the Bereans when he said:

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

We all know that God does not force any of us to pray or study. He carefully informs us as to what we ought to do. He thoughtfully gives us many examples in His Word. He lovingly provides us with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His will. But it is strictly up to you and me, brethren, whether we respond or not. God is judging us right now as to how we use the time we have been given. Every moment of every day counts! Ask yourself, if God were right here beside me now, how long would I want to spend with Him? How eager would you be to finish up talking and get on to other, more mundane things? And let your honest answer to these questions be your guide.

I strongly encourage all of us not to put off the spiritual things that ought to be occupying first place in our lives each and every day. Don't let the golden opportunities for true spiritual growth slip through your fingers. **GRAB ON NOW AND HOLD ON TIGHT!!** Go all the way with God, no matter what the cost or sacrifice; no matter what the commitment in time, energy, effort or resource may ever be! This is your **ONE, INEXPRESSIBLE, UNSPEAKABLE CHANCE FOR ETERNAL LIFE - FOR IMMORTALITY!!** See it! Believe it! Seize it! While it is called Today, hear the voice of Almighty God and **ACT NOW!!**

EXAMINE YOURSELF

Paul's incisive admonition to "let him who thinks he stand take heed, lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12) should shine like a beacon of warning for every Christian today. Never has it been easier and more tempting to simply assume that everything is just fine in our spiritual lives. We all so often and so quickly settle down into the comfortable ruts of life, making things as easy as possible on ourselves. This is a very dangerous state of mind!

The Church of God today is nearly 2,000 long years removed from the days of Jesus Christ and the early apostles, when the flame of their testimony set the world on fire. The Church today, is, to a great extent, spiritually **ASLEEP!** I think that most of us are coming to see this profound truth. Indeed, God foresaw that this condition would be extant in the latter days and His warning to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 ought to be a sobering reminder to us. Here was a church whose spiritual fire had gone out - only barely warm enough to ensure a group of tepid, room temperature Christians! Their attitude was one of indifference, complacency and apathy, thus the apt description of being *lukewarm*, a condition which Christ clearly stated made Him sick to His stomach!

The Laodicean church did a lot of **ASSUMING.** It assumed that it could see spiritually, but was really blind. It assumed that it was righteous and made a certain show of goodness, but was, in fact, naked. It assumed that it knew all the truth and was spiritually rich and had need of nothing, but was, in reality, poor and miserable. No wonder Christ sternly warned them, saying: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline! So be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Let's not mince words. This strong admonition has been preserved in the pages of the Bible for centuries, because God wants us to read it and apply it to ourselves today. It is aimed squarely at all of us right now - not somebody else! We all need to heed the advice of the apostle Paul when he told the Corinthians:

"EXAMINE YOURSELVES to see whether you are in the faith; TEST AND PROVE YOURSELVES. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" (II Cor. 13:5).

The Living Bible paraphrases this passage as follows:

"Check up on yourselves. Are you really Christians? Do you pass the test? Do you feel Christ's presence more and more within you? Or are you just pretending to be Christians?"

That ought to put the issue into perspective for all of us! Are we really willing to put the Word of God into operation in our lives or are we going to settle for merely pretending to be Christians? Are we indeed willing to TEST OURSELVES? If so, here are a few questions we might wish to consider for starters:

1. How much time, effort, energy, intensity, desire and sincerity do you put into prayer and Bible study each day?

2. Do you have difficulty praying? Is it something that you dread or don't particularly look forward to?

3. Are you spiritually ON FIRE?

4. Do you truly get answers to your prayers?

5. Do you genuinely feel a strong, real, viable link with God through Christ?

6. Are you really growing in knowledge and understanding?

7. Are you still PROVING ALL THINGS or do you find yourself always looking to others for everything?

8. Are you learning from your trials and sufferings, truly sensing the hand of God in your life, forming His own righteous character within you?

9. Are you willing, eager, even desirous to have God correct you, search your heart (as was David, Psa. 139:23; 26:2), bring you to repentance, humble you and make demonstrable changes in your life?

10. Are you truly excited about this calling, about growing spiritually? Do you deeply desire to be like God? Are you rallying around your Saviour? Are you a ZEALOT for the work and will of God? Are you going beyond the call of duty, giving it all you've got; or are you holding back, keeping one foot in the world? Do you go the extra mile spiritually or do you just tend to get by?

11. Are you INVOLVED--serving, helping, visiting, corresponding, encouraging, laboring, sacrificing, giving in every way you can to others?

12. Do you know how God has equipped you through the Spirit to contribute best to the overall work of the Body of Christ? Do you know or are you seriously searching for your own personal spiritual gifts and, if you do know them, are you using them in God's service? Do you really know how you fit into God's plan or is it mostly vague to you?

These are just a few important questions every one of us needs to honestly ask ourselves. We all may have some trouble with such a test, but we absolutely must get the answers and begin to take very, very seriously whether or not we really are ACTING on what we know and what he have been given. We must come face to face with our own individual spiritual condition and our own personal relationship with God. We cannot fake it and we cannot hide it!

I strongly encourage Christians everywhere to make certain that they are fully AWAKE, to cast off the things of this flesh, to leave behind the realm of doubt, uncertainty, indecision,

apathy and lethargy, and appear before the throne of God unvarnished, without pretense, ready to renew their commitment to the great work that must yet be accomplished in and through them. Brethren, we all must rally round our great banner - YAHWEH-NISSI!! We all must have our spiritual fire rekindled into a roaring blaze, that we might burn brightly for our God in the dark and grim days that lie ahead and that we might stand perfected before our great Saviour and King at His glorious return. Time, however, is short! Life, indeed, is short! Don't put it off any longer. Don't overlook or ignore it any longer. Don't assume that everything is fine any longer. Put yourself to the test and see if you pass; and if not, then move into action doing something about it! And the time for that ACTION IS NOW!! The question is: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?