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FRUITFULNESS: GROWTH AND THE WORD OF GOD

by Dan Trygg

After spiritual birth, does the Word continue to have an important place in the spiritual life? Most definitely. Jesus said that the true disciple is one who will continue to live in pursuit of truth (Jn. 8:31-36). It is in this continual exposure to, and response to, truth that growth and maturation occurs. It is the basis for spiritual freedom (Jn. 8:31-36) and holiness (Jn. 17:17). The Word can provide the necessary food for encouraging and sustaining the new life within us (I Pet. 2:2; I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14). It is the God-given channel for leading us into our inheritance as His children (II Pet. 1:3,4; Acts 20:32; cf. Eph. 1:15-19) and for equipping us for spiritual ministry and spiritual warfare (II Tim. 3:16,17; Eph. 6:17; e.g., Lk. 4:1-12).

Why is the Word of God so important? What does it do, and how does it operate in our lives? God consistently warns us throughout the record of His Word **that two of the greatest enemies to our remaining in relationship to Him are ignorance** (Ps. 95:10; Isa. 1:2,3; 5:13; 40:27-31; 59:8; Jer. 4:22; Hos. 4:6; Mt. 22:29; Rom. 6:3; 7:1; etc.) **and deception** (Jer. 17:9; 29:8,9; II Cor. 11:3; Col. 2; Heb. 3:13; Rev. 12:9; etc.). An incorrect or insufficient understanding of reality leaves us open to being ensnared and/or distracted by the "wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11; cf. Col. 2:6-23). Furthermore, we cannot walk in righteousness if we do not know what it is, nor if we do not know the "how to's" involved. The apostle Paul again and again emphasized the need for the one who has been born into Christ to have his or her mind and understanding remade and renewed (Rom. 12:1,2; Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:1-11; Rom. 8:1-8). **Spiritual maturity and fruitfulness hinges upon this process of mental renewal.**

It is not that knowledge is equivalent to spiritual power. It is *not*, at all. It, in itself, is powerless, sometimes even destructive (I Cor. 8:1-3). **It is only helpful as it leads us to Jesus and keeps us abiding in Him.** Power for living as a "Christ-one" is to be found only in Him. Because of our past training as a non-Christian, self-directed person, ...and because of the subtle, persuasive and pervasive nature of Satan's propagandizing in our world..., **it is virtually impossible to abide in Jesus without the continual correcting, clarifying, and training influence of God's Word**, rightly received (II Tim. 3:16,17; Jas. 1:21). It exposes the deceptive heart attitudes within us (Heb. 4:12; Ps. 19:11-13), and the false teachings and enticements surrounding us in this hostile spiritual environment in which we live (Prov. 2; I Tim. 4:6,7; 6:3-5; II Tim. 1:13,14; 4:1-4; Tit. 1:9; Eph. 4:1-14). Furthermore, it also helps to cultivate the proper heart attitude and a "holy imagination" which leads us to seek and lean upon God (Eph. 3:20,21; I Cor. 2:6-16), so essential to a mature walk in faith.

According to Heb. 5:11-14, it is one's mastery of "the word of righteousness" that is both a mark and determinant of one's level of spiritual maturity. The mature are the ones who by practice (i.e., both by diligent study and by obedience to the truth) train and hone their mental/spiritual faculties to be able to discern what is God's will versus what is error, distraction, or evil. If people do not invest time and purposeful effort into an understanding of God's truth (II Tim. 2:15), not only do they remain in ignorance (obviously), but their very sensitivity to truth, their ability to understand and discern, remains dull and restricted (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-13). In other words, not only do they not know what God desires for them to know, but they are not even *able* to learn or understand certain spiritual truths until they grow out of that state of spiritual dullness. The possibility exists that one may never grow beyond spiritual infancy (Heb. 5:11-13; I Cor. 3:1-3; cf. Eph. 4:14). Furthermore, as a spiritual babe, much of his or her Christian experience will be frustrating, mundane, and joyless (Jn. 15:7; Gal. 5:17) because:

(1.) A person cannot make use of what he or she does not know. How can one come to God to claim promises of which he or she is not even aware?

(2.) Such an individual is vulnerable to spiritual attack and defeat, having virtually no effective defense with which to resist Satanic opposition (Eph. 6:11). Putting on the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17) does not happen by itself. It requires volitional action on our part. (How else can one interpret the significance of the imperatives in vss. 10,11?) If people do not know *what* the armor is, ...that it is available for our protection..., nor *how* to put it on, they are not able to make use of it and remain precariously exposed to attack.

(3.) He or she is, to some extent, spiritually blind, and, thus, open to deception, with its accompanying frustrations, pains, and bondages (II Cor. 11:2-4,12-15; Jas. 1:5-8; Eph. 4:14; II Tim. 2:15-26; 3:6,7; Tit. 1:10-16; cf. Isa. 59:1-15).

(4.) He or she remains in slavery to sin, a hard master, indeed (Jn. 8:31-36; Rom. 6:12f).

Oh dear friend, if you belong to Christ, let the time that is past be sufficient for carrying out the desires of a worldly heart (I Pet. 4:1-6). The world, and those who are of it, is at enmity with God (Jas. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3). "Therefore", as the apostle Paul wrote, "walk no longer just as the [unbelievers] walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart ...you did not learn Christ in this way..." (Eph. 4:17,18,20). "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable, and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

Father, we would humbly ask for a renewed desire to know You, and to know Your Word. Open our eyes and teach us. Grant to us a vision of Your delightfulness, Your goodness, and Your love, that we might be drawn to pursue You. You have promised that wisdom is given to those who ask You. We beseech You, Father, make us wise to see the inestimable value of Your Word and the urgency of our times. Teach us, dear Lord, to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Wake us up out of the stupor of spiritual blindness and fleshly self-satisfaction. Ignite within us a holy flame of passion to seek You and to be used by You to illuminate our world.

FOR MEDITATION: Acts 20:32; II Timothy 3:16,17.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

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Abolishing the Laity

"For over 50 years, Elton Trueblood has carried on a crusade to 'abolish the laity'. 'The word *laity* does not appear in the Bible,' he says. Everyone, he believes, is called into ministry; the task of spreading the Word of God and the responsibility for meeting the needs of a hurting world were never meant to be the assignments of an elite group of ordained church leaders. These 'callings' belong to all Christians.

"Christianity withers when it is a spectator sport. A layman in medicine is one who cannot practice. The same with law. But there is no place in the Christian faith for those who cannot or will not practice. There are no passengers on the ship of Christ. All are members of the crew. '"