

***Serving God for a Lifetime:***

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**Growth and Development of Christian Character**

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**1. Old Man/New Man**

A. One must cross many hurdles in being converted to Christ. Once the commitment has been established, the hard work of transforming begins. Old sin patterns must be rooted out (cf. Eph 4:17-24).

1. Genetic traits which Satan can exploit for sinful purposes: temper, timidity, strong sensual passions, ambition, etc. must be tempered.
2. Conditioning – Continually gratifying the pleasure/response cycle; parental nurturing (or lack thereof) that reinforced ungodly attitudes/behavior; traditions and habits of unbelief.
3. Overall lack of self-control – Weak or no discipline; never learned work ethic or delayed gratification. Some things we must learn to say “No” to.

B. “Attitude adjustments”:

1. *“Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin ... do not let sin reign ... do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness ...”* (Rom 6:11-14).
2. *“Think on these things ...”* (Ph 4:8).
3. *“Desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”* (1 Pet 2:1-3).

C. As we devote ourselves to these things, self-control will grow, our impulses will be disciplined and we will gain spiritual stature. There will be fits and starts, setbacks and the occasional sense that we are not making progress. Growth is *gradual*.

**2. Growth of the Inner Man – 2 Pet 1:5-9**

A. Spiritual character develops by *diligently* adding certain features – 2 Pet 1:5-7:

1. Faith – A comprehensive, complex term: complete dependence upon God, obedient love, humble submission, total absorption with His character, words, promises – fellowship. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6).
2. Virtue – This is the acquisition of spiritual and moral excellence, to be transformed into the image of God; i.e., *“partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4).

3. Knowledge – Note references in 2 Pet 1:2-3, 6, 8; 2:20; 3:17-18 and “remind” in 1:12-15; 3:1. Christianity is not a “better felt than told” religion. It is truth, facts, propositions, promises – the enlightenment of the mind to the true nature of things as defined and explained by God. The life of a Christian is a never-ending process of acquiring knowledge (and *reacquiring* what has been lost).
  4. Self-control – The mastery of one’s thoughts, passions, will. We cannot be governed by our impulses; we must work to harness our potential and direct it according to God’s approval.
  5. Perseverance – This involves the ability to endure the various trials and stresses that come with living a principled life. We will be put under extreme duress and affliction; we must respond with resiliency and strength.
  6. Godliness – This is a deep respect for God, a sober awareness of His majesty and power in contrast with our smallness and impotence. The Christian grows in his awareness of God in each day’s activities and decisions. He is not consumed with the frivolity, superficiality and vanity of worldly allurements.
  7. Brotherly kindness – John especially makes it clear that true faith in God is inseparable from love for others who share the same faith. Our attitude should be as inclusive as possible, sympathetic, gentle, tolerant, forgiving, understanding. We often disguise unbrotherly behavior behind a facade of piety, standing for the truth or some other noble sounding platitude. *Do you love your brother?*
  8. Love – We aspire to love as God loves, to seek the best for all even at personal expense, inconvenience or neglect.
- B. “*If ... abound ... neither barren nor unfruitful*” (1:8). Our whole objective is to be “*useful for the Master, prepared for every good work*” (2 Tim 2:21). Too many have an “entitlement mentality” about religion: “What can *I* get out of it?” Instead, we must ask, “What can I *give back* to the Lord for all He has done for me?”
- C. Measure yourself; do you “*lack these things*” (1:9)? If so, you are blind, shortsighted and have forgotten your purging from sin. How can our wonderful salvation be swallowed up by stagnation and apathy?
- 3. Conclusion:** “*Be even more diligent ... for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly ...*” (2 Pet 1:10-11).
- A. “Diligence” is the bookend on either side of these qualities (1:5, 10).
- B. Note the second “if”: “*If you do these things ...*” (1:10b). Note the clear conditionality attached to salvation.
- C. The assurance is not that we will never *sin* but *stumble* (1:11).