

Partners in Growth: God's Work and Our Walk

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

Last week, we began an exciting new sermon series entitled “Rooted.” Picture the scene: Jesus is seated in a boat, speaking to a large crowd gathered along the shore—many of them fishermen. To capture their hearts and minds, He tells a parable about a Sower, a Seed, and four types of Soil. The Seed represents the Word of God, the Sower is Jesus Himself, and the outcome—whether that seed grows into saving faith or withers—is determined by the soil of the human heart. Some hearts are hardened by sin, leaving no room for God’s Word to take root. Others are shallow, quickly receiving the message but falling away when trials come. Still others are choked by the thorns of worldly concerns—riches, worries, and desires that smother spiritual growth. But for those whose hearts are tender, receptive, and surrendered—the seed of the gospel flourishes and produces lasting fruit.

If you’ve truly believed that Jesus Christ atoned for your sins on the cross (John 3:16), confessed Him as Lord (Romans 10:9), and sought His forgiveness, then the Father has adopted you as His child and made you an eternal heir of heaven (John 1:12)!

Do you remember that moment of salvation? The joy that welled up within you—unspeakable, overwhelming—as the chains of sin were broken and your old identity, one bound for death (Romans 6:23), was forever exchanged for new life in Christ? No longer do you need to wander this world searching for identity in the ever-shifting approval of society or chasing after treasures that vanish like mist (Matthew 6:19–21). Your identity is now secure, sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14), and your purpose is clear: to live as an ambassador of Christ, storing up treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy. And though trials still come, and hardships remain, the sting of suffering—and even of death itself—has been removed (1 Corinthians 15:55). For now, you are strengthened by the Lord (Isaiah 40:31), yoked to His grace instead of your own burdens (Matthew 11:28–30), and guarded by divine peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6–7).

But now that we’ve been saved, adopted, and sealed by the Spirit—what comes next? How do we grow? If only becoming like Jesus were as simple as flipping a switch. The reality is, spiritual growth is often complex, sometimes confusing, and at times discouraging—because while salvation happens in an instant, sanctification is a lifelong journey of transformation. Apostle Peter urges us, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). And yet, let’s be honest: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16) still wage war within us. These worldly desires can harden the soil of our hearts, making spiritual growth feel like trying to plant seeds among rocks. The Spirit of Truth dwells within us. But we often struggle to walk in holiness—not because He is silent, but because we’re still learning to listen and follow His gentle, guiding voice. His ways are higher than our ways, and His timing is perfect. When we humbly surrender and invite the Potter to reshape the clay of our hearts, He begins to do what we cannot: transform us from the inside out.

This sermon is about that very transformation—how we grow into our salvation by depending on divine grace, walking with the body of Christ, and cultivating a passion to become more like Him. So how do we grow when the path is rocky, the world is loud, and our hearts are still being softened? That’s what we’re going to explore together today...

The Foundation: Spiritual Growth Begins with God

Imagine for a moment that you are a citizen of ancient Corinth—a vibrant, cosmopolitan hub and the capital of Achaia. Your city is one of the largest and wealthiest in the Roman Empire. Located just 50 miles from Athens, with thriving ports on both sides of your narrow isthmus, you are known for your commercial influence, your world-famous bronze, and your hosting of the prestigious Isthmian Games.¹ But Corinth is also a place of moral complexity. Theaters, temples, gambling houses, brothels, and altars to countless Roman gods saturate the culture. In a city marked by wealth, indulgence, and religious pluralism, you—against all odds—heard the gospel of Jesus Christ from a man named Apollos, and it changed your life.

You gave your heart to Jesus. You want to grow. But you're now faced with a question that many around you are also asking: Who should we follow to become spiritually mature? Some say Apollos, whose eloquence and knowledge of the Scriptures drew you to faith. Others point to the Apostle Paul, the church’s founder. Still others claim allegiance to Peter, the pillar of the Jerusalem church.

Then one day, a letter arrives—a letter from Paul himself—and it’s read aloud during a church gathering. He reminds you that the church is God’s field and God’s building, not man’s. He says plainly: Paul planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but only God can make it grow. In other words, it’s not about personalities—it’s about God’s power. He’s not dishonoring Apollos, nor denying that “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Romans 10:15). Instead, Paul is urging you not to confuse the messenger with the Messiah.² Those who lead you to Christ are worthy of respect, but they cannot save you, nor can they sanctify you.³ In a world where everyone belongs to someone—whether to a household, patron, or idol—Paul declares something radically liberating: You belong to Christ. And He alone is worthy of your full devotion and gratitude.

¹ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 277-278.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [*The First Letter to the Corinthians*](#), *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 147.

³ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [*The First Letter to the Corinthians*](#), *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 147.

Spiritual maturity doesn't begin with striving—it begins with God's provision.⁴ Jesus atoned for your sins, and through the Holy Spirit, you have been born again. As Apostle Peter declares, you now participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3–4). While we may not fully grasp what that means, theologian Douglas Moo suggests it includes sharing in the very qualities that define God Himself—such as holiness, love, and righteousness. This means you can now resist sin, grow in godliness, and live a life worthy of the gospel. So today, we rejoice in the truth that our true Mentor is also our Redeemer, Lord, Savior, and King.

The Process: Cooperating with the Spirit's Work

And if we truly belong to Christ—if we've been redeemed, born again, and called to share in His divine nature—then the only reasonable response is to offer our entire lives back to Him as a living sacrifice, just as Paul urges in Romans 12:1–2. The people of Paul's day understood exactly what this language meant. They were familiar with the sacrificial system—a sacred act of reverence, humility, and confession. A worshiper would bring an animal without blemish, something they personally owned and valued. In the presence of the priest and before God, they would lay their hands on the animal's head—symbolically identifying with it—and confess their sins. At that moment, the animal was consecrated to God. It no longer belonged to the worshiper. It was now set apart for God's purpose.⁵

Then came the sobering reality: the animal died in the place of the sinner. It bore the wages of their sin—death (Romans 6:23). So, it is with the Christian life. Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, died once and for all as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. And now, through faith in Him, we are united with Him in both His death and His resurrection. Our old self has been crucified, and we are raised to live a new life of worship—not by offering dead sacrifices, but by offering ourselves as living ones, wholly surrendered to God.

Considering that we were purchased by the atoning sacrifice of Christ, our response should not be passive or occasional. It should compel us to continually invite the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts, renew our minds, and shape our daily actions. As those who have been “called out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), we must not respond to such grace with indifference. Rather, we respond with deep gratitude, knowing that we have been predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29). God's goal is not merely to inform us—but to transform us. It is one thing to offer God a portion of our time, talent, or treasure on a Sunday morning—but quite another to become a living sacrifice every day of the week. Christ did not send

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, [2 Peter, Jude](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 41.

⁵ James R. Edwards, [Romans](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 283.

the Holy Spirit just to enlighten our minds, stir our emotions, or enhance our talents.⁶ No—He came to redeem the whole person: mind, heart, soul, and strength.

Spiritual growth begins when we no longer make peace with our sin. We must ask the Spirit to produce in us a holy hatred for sin, to replace the fleeting pleasure we once found in it with a desire for what is holy and eternal. Growth is not a one-time decision—it’s a lifelong process of rejecting the ways of this world and surrendering our will to the Father as we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12–13). Every day, we are called to renew our commitment to the Lord, inviting Him to prune away what is sinful and unfruitful, and to cultivate in us the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

We have been introduced into the life of the world to come. What a tragedy it would be if we, who are destined for glory, conformed to the perishing world we have left behind.⁷

The Pattern: Growth is a Lifelong Journey

And while spiritual growth is undeniably personal, it was never meant to be private. The journey of becoming more like Christ is one we walk together, as members of the body of Christ, called to build one another up in faith, love, and truth. If we’re going to truly throw off the shackles of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander (1 Peter 2:1–3)—the sins that stunt spiritual growth—we can’t do it alone. We need fellow believers to speak truth into our lives, to correct us in love, to encourage us when we stumble, and to stir up in us a hunger for more than just spiritual milk. It is through life in community that we are challenged not only to crave the Word, but to grow into maturity, feeding on the solid meat of God’s truth.

We live in an age where opinions masquerade as truth and false teachings spread like wildfire. Many who profess to believe in God now promote distorted messages such as:

- “If you have enough faith, God will guarantee you financial success, physical health, and a comfortable life.”
- “To truly love someone, you must affirm their lifestyle, beliefs, and identity—no matter what they are.”
- “The Bible has been corrupted by flawed men, so just pick and choose what feels right to believe.”
- “Everyone will be saved eventually—hell is just a scare tactic.”
- “Once redeemed, a believer can no longer sin.”

⁶ James R. Edwards, [Romans](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 282.

⁷ Leon Morris, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 435.

- “Gender and sexuality don’t matter—God made me this way, and that’s all that counts!”

Apostle Paul warns us that when we remain spiritual infants, we are easily tossed back and forth by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). You might think you would never be fooled by such charlatans but remember we wrestle not against “flesh and blood” but against the “powers of this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12). In other words, without maturity, we become vulnerable to whatever ideology happens to be popular now.⁸

But instead of being swept away by the prevailing crazes and cultural trends of this fallen world, we are called to anchor ourselves in the body of Christ, under the headship of Jesus, who alone is the final and flawless arbiter of truth. As we grow, we must put on God’s armour and His truth through prayer, fasting, and meditation on His Word, doing so not in pride or isolation, but in love—love for God and for one another. Just as muscles, nerves, and limbs are joined and coordinated in the human body, so too are believers joined and interdependent, not only on the Vine (John 15:5), but also on each other.⁹ This kind of truth-bound, Christ-centered love becomes the soil in which spiritual maturity flourishes. For we truly are better together strengthening one another in the faith, submitting our lives to Christ, and allowing His Spirit to rule and transform us from the inside out.

The Goal: Christlikeness for God’s Glory

While it’s true that God is sovereign and our salvation is secure, we must be careful that this blessed assurance does not lull us into lukewarmness or spiritual passivity.¹⁰ The believer’s initial act of faith is not the finish line—it is the foundation upon which God intends to build a lifelong process of re-creation into His image.¹¹ Every Christian is not only duty-bound, but more importantly, love-bound, to repent of ongoing sin and to continually ask the Potter to shape and form Christlikeness into every part of their life—thoughts, desires, relationships, and daily actions.¹²

⁸ Arthur G. Patzia, [*Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 245.

⁹ Tony Merida, [*Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 102.

¹⁰ James Shaddix and Daniel L. Akin, [*Exalting Jesus in 2 Peter, Jude*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 2 Pe 1:5–7.

¹¹ James Shaddix and Daniel L. Akin, [*Exalting Jesus in 2 Peter, Jude*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 2 Pe 1:5–7.

¹² Norman Hillyer, [*1 and 2 Peter, Jude*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 165.

To keep us from becoming ineffective and unproductive in our walk with Christ, the Apostle Peter calls us to a life of intentional spiritual progression:

“Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”

—2 Peter 1:5–8

Peter reminds us that simply participating in the divine nature does not mean we automatically possess these virtues. We must pursue them, daily and diligently, through Spirit-empowered effort. In a world that constantly pressures us to conform to its patterns, we need self-control to resist temptation, and perseverance to endure hardship with our eyes fixed heavenward living each day with a passion to honor Christ and to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. True reverence for God requires total submission to His authority—not out of fear alone, but because we are basking in the beauty of His love, forgiveness, and grace. Our ultimate purpose in this life is simple, yet profound: to do good, and to glorify our Father in heaven.

Conclusion

So, let me ask you—what kind of soil are you? Has the Word of God found fertile ground in your heart? Has the seed of the gospel been allowed to take deep root? Or have thorns, rocks, and the distractions of this world begun to choke out your growth?

We have been saved by grace, sealed by the Spirit, and set apart for God’s purpose—not to remain stagnant, but to be transformed daily into the image of Christ. Spiritual growth is not optional for the believer—it is the natural outcome of a heart that has been made alive in Jesus. But it doesn’t happen by accident. It requires surrender, community, truth, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The call of Christ is not merely to believe once—but to grow continually. To lay down our lives as living sacrifices. To throw off sin. To fight for holiness. To love deeply. To build up one another. To stand firm in truth. And to become more like the Savior who died and rose again for us.

So let us not settle for shallow faith or worldly comfort. Let us press on, rooted and grounded in Christ, growing in grace and truth until the day we see Him face to face. May our lives be like well-watered gardens, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, bringing glory to our Father in heaven—so that when the world sees us, they don’t just see people who believe...

They see people who are becoming. Becoming more like Christ.

For His glory. And for the good of the world He came to save.

Amen.