



## A Christian Looking Back

We are now at the end of this year and looking at the start of another year. We will be told to make resolutions and to examine the past year. Fine, but where does eternity fit in with all of this? Where does all of this fit into the eternal plans of God? So often this time of year the distinction between the professing believer and the true believer is at best diminished or hidden. What is the difference between the way a believer looks over the past year and then looks at the coming year? Should a believer look over a past year and should the believer make resolutions for the coming year?

It is interesting to look over the past year from a biblical view. If we want to ask ourselves about the previous year, the Bible would require us to ask ourselves about spiritual growth rather than financial growth or other things. A pastor would want to ask if the church he is pastor of is growing spiritually as that is the most important part. If a church has had numerical growth and yet there is no sign of spiritual growth, then that church has not grown at all. If a church has had people truly grow spiritually, then that church has grown in the most important way. If an individual has grown spiritually, then regardless of his or her health and financial issues that person has grown and it has been a successful year.

Many people have been through many difficult health issues the past year and others have went through some hard financial troubles over the past year. Sometimes the two issues are connected. However, a person can die and their health and financial problems will no longer be there for them. But their spiritual state will be with them for eternity. In other words, the most important thing to examine for the past year is an examination for spiritual life and spiritual growth. The true state of the church and of the individual has to do with spiritual growth. If there is no growth, then a person has suffered true decline regardless of how good other things appear. This is true because no one stays in the same place. We either go down or we go up because the evil one is always trying to tear down.

As you look over the past year, have you grown in knowledge of God? While many are satisfied with activities and works, and some are satisfied with just attending services, have you grown in knowledge? We must remember how Psalm 1 teaches us to stay in the Word: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psa 1:1-3). It is a person staying in the Word and meditating on that Word that leads to a person being like a tree

planted by streams of water and that leads to a life that yields fruit and then prospers. This describes the person that is growing spiritually, though we must be careful and not apply all things about this in all ways. Christ learned obedience from suffering so it is not as though spiritual growth is seen by how well or easy things go in life as a whole.

While this may sound like something that is little more than taking a test to see if one has more factual information, it is far more than that. Growing in knowledge as the Bible sets it out is far more than just knowing facts, it is growing in knowing God Himself through Christ. Eph 4:15 speaks directly to the church, but is also instructive to individuals: "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ." Spiritual growth is growing in all aspects, but all of those aspects are into Him. The believer is related to Christ as the branch is to the vine. All that the believer (the branch) receives is from Christ (the vine). Apart from the vine the branch can do nothing and apart from Christ the believer can do nothing (John 15:5). Spiritual growth is always related to a growth that comes from Christ and is growing in Christ.

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## Associational News & Prayer Requests

If you would like to submit prayer requests or information for the weekly update, please email it to [trinity@wamego.net](mailto:trinity@wamego.net).

## William Still comments on 2 Tim. 2:1-10

We have to hand on the full truth to faithful people, who will be able to teach others. We must pay less attention to the numbers and more to quality: rather two or three faithful ones than twenty whose Christian commitment is shallow and limited.

We are to endure hardness (and this may mean more than unbelievers making faces at us and throwing jibes). We must be absolutely all and only for Jesus, separated, and sold to him. And being so, we must not think we have the right to make demands out of some mistaken notion of supposed rights owed to those holding spiritual office: it is sowing and hard work before harvest. Some Christian workers, as soon as they take on service for God, want harvest without effort or time elapsing. 'Foolish!' says Paul in effect. 'Use your head and think these things out.'

Jesus suffered first in the body of humiliation before he went to glory, therefore I must suffer before I reign, and must suffer if others are to obtain salvation. Whether we are faithful to Christ or not, he will not change; but if we are faithful, we must know that trial comes before glory. Happy is the person who sees this and willingly endures. "There is no gain but by a loss; we cannot save but by the cross. The corn of wheat to multiply, must fall into the ground and die."



## A Christian Looking Back (Continued)

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We are told to grow by the Word: “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet 2:2). We must never forget the importance of being a student of Holy Scripture. It is nourishment for the soul and we must have it to grow much in the same way as a baby needs milk to grow. The nutrition that a baby needs comes from the milk and the spiritual nutrition that a believer needs comes from the Word. Believers must grow in respect to salvation. On the other hand 2 Peter 3:18 tells us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18). Scripture, however, must be viewed as a means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We must look by faith beyond the words (not apart from the meaning of the words) that can be seen in a humanistic or human oriented way to look at the true nature of God shining in and through the words. We may grow in an understanding of intellectual things or of fact concerning Scripture, but until we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ we have yet to really see what Scripture is about. We are still at famine stage without this. Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ? If not, you are not growing in reality.

Hebrews 5:12-6:1 should shock all people when it is read carefully as the very words of God:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. <sup>6:1</sup> Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

There are perhaps many people who should not be teaching Scripture while there are many others that should have been teaching by now. Both have the same problem and that is that they have not gone beyond milk (elementary teachings of Scripture) to the deeper things of God (meat). There are many people in our day who are satisfied with what they have learned and simply seem to exist in the same state as before. They get up in the morning, go to work, come home and then when they need to they attend a church service. But where is the living God in all of this? Where is the striving to grow in spiritual things, that is, in grace and knowledge? It is so easy in one sense just to get the daily things of life done and do the church thing and never truly strive for spiritual growth. It is so easy for a pastor just to do the expected things and never strive for growth himself. If the pastor is not striving to grow himself, then he is most likely not going to be doing much to help others strive for spiritual growth.

As the individual and the church looks back over the year, each

must be careful to look for spiritual growth rather than to judge by other things. There are perhaps three major things to judge true growth by, though they are all connected. They are holiness, love and humility. A person that is growing in grace and knowledge will always be growing in humility because God only gives grace to the humble. A person that is growing in grace and knowledge will always be growing in holiness because God is holy and true grace always makes a person like God. A person that is growing in grace and knowledge will always be growing in love because God is love and those He gives Christ to have love for God shed abroad in their hearts.

If we look in our hearts and see that we have not really grown, then we must realize that this is not an option for the next year. If we have not grown, we must wonder if Christ really lives in our hearts. After all, growth is a sign of life. Those who possess eternal life will also grow for eternity in the sense that they will have more and more of the infinite Christ who is eternal life Himself. Examine your heart and the church you attend or pastor by asking the following questions. What do we need to see these things happen? We must have more of grace and humility.

1. Have you truly hungered and thirsted after holiness this past year? Hunger is also a sign of life.
2. Have you grown in the mundane things of life in doing them out of love for Christ?
3. Have you grown in desiring God Himself and His glory displayed in the world even if it is through others?
4. Have you grown by losing desire for your own reputation and honor and growing in desire for God's?
5. Have you grown by not serving and loving self as much but in loving God more?
6. Have you grown in hating sin more by loving Christ more?
7. Have you grown by discovering sin in your heart and yet by Christ being formed in that same heart?
8. Have you grown by becoming more and more detached from the things of the world (even lawful ones)?
9. Have you grown by truly desiring what is truly good for others at your own expense and comfort?
10. Have you grown by not keeping score of how others wrong you and returning good for evil?
11. Have you grown by showing true kindness to those who despise you?
12. Have you grown by truly seeing yourself as a creature before its Creator?
13. Have you grown by seeing yourself as totally dependent on Him?
14. Have you grown by an increasing sense of your nothingness and insufficiency in all things?
15. Have you grown by a craving desire to know God and to be in communion with Him through Christ?

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