

We have seen that, first, we must be saved, and after that we must grow spiritually. This is God's will for all human beings no matter what their time or circumstance. We are all called to believe in Jesus Christ for Salvation. Then we are called to grow in our understanding of and confidence in Him. That is our spiritual duty.

<sup>13</sup> Now all has been heard;  
here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the ***duty of all mankind***.  
<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil.  
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NIV)

Human beings have a vast array of pursuits and lusts, so all sorts of people feel like they have all kinds of duties, sometimes to family, sometimes to friends, sometimes to masters or employers, and sometimes to themselves, and they may indeed have these duties, since there are all sorts of legitimate divinely sanctioned responsibilities that a human being may have in all manner of contexts, but the ultimate and overarching duty of man is to submit to God and obey Him. Within this duty is contained all our other real duties. There is a competition, it is true, among our duties, since there is a limit to what we can do with what time and energy we have, but if we are truly walking with a view to pleasing God, we will find that we will also satisfy all our other responsibilities. That is to say, that it is clearly every human being's true responsibility to accept the Gospel and grow spiritually.

We have also seen that the point of spiritual growth is "fruit-bearing" (as we see in John 15:16) or ability to do "works of service" (as we see in Ephesians 4:12). This is the goal. But to understand it a little better, we will discuss a bit more what spiritual growth is.

We have learned that spiritual growth is learning and believing all that the Bible teaches. This is obviously the same as getting to know who God is and what pleases Him. The Bible is all about God. It is the very mind of Christ and Christ is Himself the very expression of God.

<sup>2</sup> . . . in these last days he has ***spoken to us by his Son***, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the ***exact representation*** of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.  
Hebrews 1:2-3a (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
John 1:1 (NIV)

<sup>39</sup> You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me  
John 5:39 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> for,  
“Who has known the mind of the Lord  
so as to instruct him?”  
But we have the mind of Christ.  
1 Corinthians 2:16 (NIV)

So, spiritual growth is about getting to know Who God is and what He wants of us. The better we know the Lord and the better we understand Him and His Way, the better we can walk with Him. This quality of walk with Him is the goal of spiritual growth.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.  
Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.  
2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

As we learn the Scriptures, we are individually changed to become more and more like what we are seeing in them (2 Corinthians 3:18; cf. James 1:25). This is the goal, a transformation of our own character to more closely reflect the Lord’s as we get to know Him better and better. It isn’t just that we get better at staying away from sin as Galatians 5:16-25 teaches (note the fruit of the Spirit in vv. 22-23 especially); it is also that we get better and better at doing the good works that God wants us to do.

To explore this last statement a little more closely...

Sin is a major concern for believers. In fact, a large number of believers worry about their salvation because of a very keen awareness of moral failure. That we have sensitive consciences is a good thing, but that we should worry about our salvation because of our sin is not. As we learned in our discussion about the Gospel, our salvation is entirely hinged on our faith. We are saved as long as we believe. The only sense in which sin has anything to do with it is that sin can cause hardness of heart and seduce us into throwing away our faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:13). So, our behavior does not really say much about our true spiritual status, but this does not remove the need for a sanctified walk.

<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”  
2 Timothy 2:19 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. <sup>5</sup> And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:  
“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,  
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
<sup>6</sup> For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives.”  
Hebrews 12:4-6 (NKJV)

Sin is certainly something that we should avoid, even if sinning does not mean that we have lost our salvation. Avoiding sin, however, is by no means easy. In fact, we know that we will not be free of sin while we are in this body (James 3:2; 1 John 1:8). But we are still responsible to walk in greater and greater sanctification (Matthew 5:48). The way that this is at all possible is by listening to what the Bible teaches, believing it, and diligently applying it to our lives.

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.  
<sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.  
Galatians 5:16-18 (NIV)

<sup>63</sup> It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.  
John 6:63 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.  
John 16:12-13 (NIV)

Since the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, it seems obvious then that the truth that we believe in our hearts will steadily steer us away from sin as we diligently try to obey it.

<sup>9</sup> How can a young person stay on the path of purity?  
By living according to your word.  
Psalms 119:9 (NIV)

Spiritual defence, as this writer’s mentor calls it, is good and necessary, but it doesn’t accomplish very much without spiritual offence, as he calls it too. On the one hand, resolving in ourselves to stay away from sin and actively doing our best to do so (that is, spiritual defence) is a good and praiseworthy thing to do, but it will ultimately fail without deliberating taking in more and more of Bible truth that transforms us from the inside out (spiritual offence). This is the point of Romans 12:1-2. If we are deliberately learning Bible truth and believing it and doing our best to obey it, we are also being changed from the inside out by it, so that we will find ourselves increasingly disinclined to sin.

The second part of the statement that we have been examining for the last few paragraphs is that the goal of spiritual growth is also to make us better at doing the good works that God wants us to do.

<sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do **good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.  
Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for [their individual] **works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up  
Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as **each part does its work**.  
Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

Romans 1:13 (NKJV) (cf. John 15:16; Philippians 4:17)

Although we certainly have a responsibility to avoid sin, we have an even more significant one to contribute positively to the growth and maturity of the Church of Jesus Christ that comprises all believers near and far. We each have some spiritual gift or combination of gifts and unique opportunities in which to deploy them for the benefit of fellow believers. That deployment is what the Bible calls our "works of service," our "good works," our "fruit" or "harvest" or just our "work." As John 15:8 teaches us, producing a great deal of these things is actually how we glorify our Father in Heaven. This, then, is the goal of spiritual growth: to glorify God by doing our bit to help others to come to know Him and love Him too just as we have been helped to do so in our own turn. This is what it means to love one another.

In conclusion, we grow spiritually in order to behave in a manner that more and more reflects our association with Jesus Christ and in order to be able to do our part in helping our fellow believers to grow spiritually and bear fruit for God too.