

## **Growth**

### **As Long as Faith Is Growing, It Is Acceptable.**

- (2 Peter 1:2 – 11) “An entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom” if we diligently add these character traits to our faith. As will be described in subsequent passages, the “exceedingly great and precious promises” by which we partake “of the divine nature” are for faithful people who are still breathing, just as they are described in the past tense as “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”
- (2 Thessalonians 1:3 – 8) The growing faith of the Christians of Thessalonica was “manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.”
- (1 Peter 2:1 – 3) “Desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby, up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”
- (2 Corinthians 10:15) The church in Corinth did about everything wrong, but Paul anticipated growth in their faith.
- (Romans 14:1) Paul described those who were weak in faith, and those who were strong. In verse 19, the transition was through edification.

### **How Do We Know That Our Faith Is Acceptable?**

Establishing our own benchmark for acceptability is a recipe for self deception. Instead, God must let us know. How is God to go about that? God must tell us in a way that is in keeping with the methods He has used to this point: blatant and unmistakable physical evidence. Here are a few examples.

- (2 Corinthians 4:7) “We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the power may be of God and not of us.” The context of chapters 4 and 5 is evangelism. Those who observe this power are outsiders. When outsiders recognize that what you just did was obviously beyond your ability, you know that God thinks your faith is acceptable.
- (Romans 12:1 – 8) “God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Following are examples of different gifts. God promises gifts to the faithful, not the unfaithful. If you were an accountant before becoming a Christian, and you volunteered to be church treasurer after becoming a Christian, that is not a gift. You were an accounting whiz before God gave you anything. Of course, using your accounting skill for the good of the kingdom is a nice thing to do, but it is not a gift from God. Rather, when you suddenly are able to do a good thing that you could not do before espousing faith, that’s a gift and your evidence. So, your gift cannot be singing unless you were essentially tone-deaf before faith, but a virtuoso after, and not after several years of voice lessons.
- (1 Peter 4:7 – 11) Peter admonished Jewish Christians in Turkey to do these things “with the ability which God supplies.” Believers and unbelievers are quite capable of doing nice things. When someone does a nice thing for you, you should say, “Thank-you.” The gifts suggested by Peter caused unbelievers to comment on the character of God (glorify God),

not on the character of the do-gooder. Jesus made the same analogy in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup>

- (John 17:20 – 23) I do not think it is a big leap to say that the things for which Jesus prayed in the Garden came to pass. In this short paragraph, Jesus asked that the unity of future believers be an evidence that He was for real. Further, He prayed that they be “perfect”<sup>2</sup> in that unity. Jesus further prays that they have His “glory,” which is a parade of positive character traits. Unity, consistency, and a boatload of positive character traits are not normal in this world. Jesus wanted to use those characteristics in the church as His physical evidence.
- (Romans 8:13) Humanity has a poor track record of “putting to death the deeds of the body.” If you overcome a bad habit by superior self-control (and maybe a self-help book from Barnes and Noble), that is a good thing. If you have failed so many times you have lost count and have given up ever overcoming that weakness, and then, after becoming a Christian, you rid yourself of that addiction essentially overnight, that’s evidence.
- (2 Corinthians 3:16 – 18) We are being transformed. Some think that the transformation of our characters will take place only at resurrection. Paul told the misfit Corinthian Christians that they were a work in progress while still breathing. Think of this as a parallel to addiction. While a lack of, for example, patience probably is not connected to substance abuse, that character flaw can be just as debilitating, although probably not resulting in incarceration. If you have spent decades unsuccessfully trying to be more patient, and then in response to submitting a claim to God concerning that promise, you are remarkably patient, you have your evidence.
- (1 John 2:27) Learning something without a qualified human teacher is rare. Abraham Lincoln was said to have been self-taught. An imposing list may be found by googling “autodidacts.” Nevertheless, such people are a low probability. Yet, John informed the faithful that they had no need that anyone teach them. The key word there is “need.” Teachers are not essential. But, as any reader of 1 John illustrates, gathering the ideas of others is a good thing. I liken the confirmation of this promise to those times when, completely out of your depth in a discussion of spiritual things, you say just the right thing or find just the right reference. Of course, some people can do this as a result of long experience and extensive study (both of which are good things). But when the untaught shock themselves, they have evidence that God considers their growing faith acceptable at that moment in time. Of course, it must keep growing, but they know that they are on the right track, even if only on the first lap.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:16

<sup>2</sup> “Perfect” in the New Testament is a poor translation of the Greek word *teleios* (τελειος). In modern translations, “mature” and “complete” are also used, but arbitrarily and without linguistic foundation. “Consistent” is a much better definition which may be substituted into all of the passages where *telios* appears.