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citadels. Had he not "increased ... in strength" in his early days as a Christian, he may not have done all that he did.

but you (and I) can be giants for the Lord when we increase in our spiritual strength and grow as a Christian should!

"Not to know is ignorance, but to refuse to learn is pride." - L.E. Sloan *Credit: www.southside-churchofchrist.com* ♦

You may never (physically) grow more than five feet tall,

How Can We Understand the Bible Correctly?

By Kevin A. Sulc

The fact that there are so many different interpretations of various scriptures is a major source of division among "Bible believers." Why is this? An increasingly popular answer and "solution" is the notion that most of what the Bible teaches (AKA doctrine) is not really important anyway and so it doesn't matter. Everyone should just "agree to disagree."

This popular philosophy is a superficial solution because it only ignores the problem. This then creates another problem when it comes to Bible study: people don't. If it doesn't really matter, then why bother? The result is a divided and ignorant religion. Hardly a solution. Furthermore, Jesus Himself said that we cannot separate doing God's will from knowing concerning the doctrine (read **John 7:17**).

We have dealt with this question several times over the last two years in this paper (the publication that this was originally printed in, jlp). We have done so because it is one of those basic problems which must be solved if TRUE Christianity is to be found and practiced. Again we point out that blame for this problem cannot be placed on the Bible for it was written to be understood (read **Ephesians 3:1-6**). Nor can we rest in ignorance for to acknowledge that the Bible is the Spirit-inspired Word of God is to admit

the necessity for all of us to become students of it. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (**Romans 8:14**).

Of course many today who read such passages say, "See, Bible understanding is not important, all you need is for the Spirit to lead you!" Do they know how the Spirit leads us? God has not left us to our own assumptions.

Paul, in the same letter in which he affirmed that we have to read what he wrote to understand the mystery of Christ, says the following: "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,...and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ...taking ...the sword of the Spirit, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD" (read **Ephesians 6:10-17**).

Knowing then that Bible knowledge is essential, we are back to our question, worded in a positive way, "How can I correctly interpret the Bible?" Our method of Bible study and the tools we use to aid our study are no doubt among the areas which need to be addressed. But our attitude perhaps more greatly affects our understanding of God's word than anything else. This is clearly demonstrated in the scriptures. *Credit: www.moodychurchofchrist.com* ♦

Can You Imagine?

1. Paul saying: "You don't have to obey the gospel to be saved?" Read **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9**.
2. Paul saying: "We are sprinkled with him in baptism?" Read **Romans 6:4**.
3. Jude saying: "I don't think it is right to argue the scriptures?" Read **Jude 3**.

About the Hillcrest church of Christ

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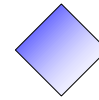


Schedule of Assembly

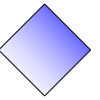
Bible Study: Sunday, 9:00am
Worship Service: Sunday, 10:00am
Bible Study: Wednesday, 7:00pm*

*A song service is held on the last Wednesday of every month

www.hillcrestchurchofchrist.com



The Voice of Truth



March 27, 2011

Promises

By Jimmy Pettigrew

"Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue; whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust" (**2 Peter 1:3-4**).

God's promises are great and precious; they have been made possible because of God's glory and virtue. Peter stresses that these precious promises enable one to become a partaker of the divine nature. God promised the Messiah (**Genesis 3:15**), and in the fullness of time (**Galatians 4:4**) sent His Son. God promised the Kingdom of Christ would never be destroyed (**Daniel 2:44**). The Lord will come again (**Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**); He promised the resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:22; John 4:28-29**); the judgment (**Romans 2:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27**); Hell for the wicked (**Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**); salvation for the baptized believer (**Mark 16:16**); spiritual blessings in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**); Salvation to the obedient (**Hebrews 5:8-9**); The crown of life to the faithful (**Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:8**), and even material blessings to those who put God and His Kingdom first (**Matthew 6:33**).

(**1 Thessalonians 4:17**); this earth shall be burned up (**2 Peter 3:7-10**). God has never promised that the Lord will establish a kingdom when He comes. The Bible teaches that the Lord's kingdom was established upon Pentecost in **Acts 2**; that the Lord is now reigning over His kingdom. God has never promised to save everybody. The Bible teaches that provisions have been made for all men (**John 3:16**); that God wants all men to be saved (**2 Peter 3:9**); that the Savior's invitation must be extended to all men (**Matthew 11:28**). Specific conditions must be met! God never promised to save those who would not obey Him. The Bible teaches saving faith is an obedient faith (**Romans 1:5; James 2:14ff**); He is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (**Hebrews 5:8**); Vengeance will be taken upon those who obey **not** (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**). God has never promised to save those outside the church. The Bible teaches the saved are added to the church (**Acts 2:47**); The Lord is the Savior of the body (**Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23 Colossians 1:18, 24**), God never promised to save those who refuse to be baptized. The Bible teaches that baptism is essential to salvation (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 2:20-21**); Baptism puts one into Christ (**Galatians 3:27**); every spiritual blessing is in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**).

God has never promised that the Lord will return to the earth. The Bible teaches we shall meet the Lord in the air

Let us be careful not to base our hopes upon things assumed! ♦

"THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS"

By Jimmy Pettigrew

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus," (**Acts 4:13**). The Jewish people saw a change in the apostles. They boldly told the people of being guilty of killing the Son of God (**Acts 2**). Even though they were unlearned, they could with boldness and spiritual knowledge confront the Jewish leaders.

WHY? Because they had been with Jesus! The same principle is still at work among the disciples of Jesus today. Just as the Jewish people saw a change in the apostles, do people see a change in us? Can they tell we have been with Jesus?

Do they see a change in our life serving God and doing His will, or do they see the same person doing the same

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things in life as he/she did before? It is the Christian's responsibility to serve God, not mammon (**Matthew 6:24**). Serving God means serving Christ, which in turn, means following and living for Christ (**John 12:26**). It is mockery to claim to be a servant of Christ while living in disobedience to Him (**Luke 6:46**). Living for Christ demands us to live differently. Are we walking differently, or are we walking the same path that we followed before being a Christian? Can people see a change in us? Can people see the difference from church and the world?

Elders and deacons, are you being the best examples living before the flock? Do you study, try to convert others,

“Increasing In Strength”

By Jarrod Jacobs

Spiritual growth is something that is required of all children of God. Unlike our involuntary physical growth, one can control his/her spiritual growth, and does so on a daily basis. In fact, the Bible even commands men and women to grow spiritually. The apostle Peter wrote, *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (**I Pet. 2:2; II Pet. 3:18**). In the book of Hebrews, the Jewish Christians were chastised and rebuked for not growing as they should. They were told, *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (**Heb. 5:12-14**).

Based on these passages, we can learn some vital points concerning spiritual growth. We learn that spiritual growth: **1)** Begins at an early spiritual age. Those who are new babes in Christ can and must “grow.” **2)** One grows through a diet of “milk” (or “the first principles”) and then later advances to the “meat” of God’s word. **3)** One grows from a babe in Christ to mature in Christ through “exercising” and using the senses. **4)** One’s growth and maturity in Christ is seen as one is better able to discern *“both good and evil.”*

Now that we understand these points, let us study

give generously, attend gospel meetings, and assemble every time the doors are open? Sadly, some are not! No wonder why members think it is unimportant to do these vital things; it is difficult to follow that kind of leadership! Members, are you being the best examples to the world (**Matthew 5:13-16**)? Elders and preachers should not have to beg Christians to study, try to convert others, give generously, attend gospel meetings, and even assemble regularly. True servants do not have to be begged.

Brethren, we are to change our inner man which results in a change of our daily living. We are to be holy in all manner of life (**1 Peter 1:15**). We cannot live in a “twilight zone!” *

about one specific case of spiritual growth in the New Testament. Saul (Paul) is a prime example of one who grew spiritually, and grew fairly quickly in the faith. We find the record of his conversion in **Acts 9**. There, Christ told him to go to Damascus and it would be told him what he *“must do”* to be saved (**Acts 9:3-6**). Saul entered the city, and for three days and nights fasted and prayed before God (**v. 9, 11**). Once Ananias told him what he must do, Saul was baptized for the remission of his sins (**v. 17-18**). Then, *“he took food and was strengthened”* (**v. 19**).

Following this, we see Saul with the disciples at Damascus. Notice what happened then: *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ”* (**Acts 9:20-22**).

Notice that in the text of **Acts 9:19-22**, the words *“strengthened”* and *“strength”* were used in reference to Saul. Do these words refer to the same thing? No. One time, Saul *“was strengthened”* after having received food. Remember, he had gone without food or drink for three straight days (**Acts 9:9**). The next time the word was used, we find Saul increasing *“the more in strength”* as a result of his preaching Christ (**v. 20**), and confounding (baffling) the Jews (**v. 22**).

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Now, what was the difference between the first use of the word *“strength”* or *“strengthened”* and the second? The difference was that Saul was strengthened physically the first time, and spiritually the second time.

How did Saul increase *“the more in (spiritual) strength”*? It came through his learning and then his proclaiming the truth concerning Christ. Two, it came through his obedience and standing for the truth even when it contradicted his former lifestyle (**Acts 9:21**). It also came through controversy, i.e., confounding the Jews concerning Christ. What we read in **Acts 9:20-22** is a specific application of **Hebrews 5:14** which tells us spiritual growth requires us having our *“senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

A problem that is plaguing the Lord’s church in many places today is a lack of maturity on the part of Christians. Too many congregations have 20, 30, and 40 year-old babies when it comes to spiritual growth. These people cannot teach, they cannot lead the worship services, they cannot talk to someone about their soul one-on-one, they have little interest in spiritual matters, they know very little about the Bible, (other than what the preacher has said) and they certainly want nothing to do with controversy or with having to maintain the lines God has drawn against sin and error, i.e., *“discerning good and evil”* (See also: **Ezek. 22:26**)! It seems rather than increasing *“the more in strength”* as Saul did, they are satisfied to be baptized, and then “live and let live.” They are spiritual weaklings (some call them “spiritual invertebrates” — no backbone!); spiritual babies who need to be rebuked for their lack of growth (**Heb. 5:12-14**).

Brethren, we cannot have this attitude if we are going to be what God wants us to be. Let us have the fire and zeal of Saul. In fact, he would later write to Titus and say that Christ died *“that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”* (**Tit. 2:14**). He wrote the Romans that Christians must be, among other things, *“fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”* (**Rom. 12:11**). We will not be what God wants us to be if we do not have that fire and fervor to stand for God’s word, to proclaim it far and wide, and let the chips fall where they may!

It is past time that we got busy on our spiritual growth. Brethren, this is not something that you wait for like a teenager’s “growth spurt.” Spiritual growth is something we must work at on a daily basis.

Why did Saul increase *“the more in strength”*? It was not because someone else did his work, nor because he let people think what they wanted to about Christ and His church. He did not grow as a result of “taking his seat” and waiting for strangers to walk in the door at Damascus or Jerusalem. He did not grow by saying that he and the Jews were “worshipping the same God.” Saul stands out as a good example for all of us, because when we do what he did, we will grow as he did!

Was this all Saul did in order to become strong spiritually? Of course, not! We see Saul (Paul) consistently in prayer with God (**Eph. 1:15-23, 3:13-21; Phil. 1:3-4; Col. 1:3; I Thess. 1:2; II Tim. 1:3**). We see sacrifices Saul (Paul) made for the Lord (**Acts 15:25-26, 16:22-23, 21:13, 23:12-13; II Cor. 11:8, 23-28, 12:15; Col. 4:10, 18**). We also find Saul (Paul) concerned about his brethren, and being a good example toward them (**II Cor. 11:28; I Thess. 2:2-12**). All of these things played a part in Saul’s spiritual growth; and in **Acts 9:20-22**, we find a living example of **Hebrews 5:14**.

By the way, how is our growth? Are we still a ways off from where we would like to be as a Christian? I know of no person who would say they have grown as much as needed, do you? Therefore, let us get to work and be busy in our spiritual growth.

Let us follow the righteous example of Saul (Paul) who shows us what true strength is (**I Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17**). Let us not merely tolerate, but demand that the strong, sound preaching of the gospel thunder forth from the pulpit. Let us challenge ourselves to bring others to Christ by explaining the truth to them. Let us not back down from the devil when he rears his head and challenges us. Let us not apologize for controversy between truth and error. Let us, with a determined resolve, stand as Saul stood, and do what he did. Let us *“confound the Jews”* of our day and discern both good and evil that we might lead others to Christ. *“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”* (**Gal. 6:9**)

Conclusion

Who knows the untold numbers of people that came to the Lord as a result of Saul’s (Paul’s) work (**Acts 19:10, 28:23-24, 30-31**, etc.). But, he could have done nothing had he sat on the sidelines and been satisfied to occupy his space, and not challenge error in her strongholds and

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