

# Essentials for Spiritual Growth

## Lesson # 1 - Seeking to Understand our Greatness and Wretchedness

### Introduction

- A. The **basis for spiritual growth** is found in an understanding of salvation and sanctification; which is based on the truths regarding the person and work of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit; which is based on the truths regarding the meaning of the Fall and sin; which is based on the truths regarding the meaning of creation and revelation; which is based on the truths regarding the True and Living God, in particular His attributes, decrees, and names.
- B. The obvious question therefore, is "If that is true why not start with the True and Living God and proceed through all the foundations upon which the Christian life and growth is based?"
- C. The answer is found in what usually happens within us when we read/study the Bible and the truths/promises given us in the Scripture. On one hand we are able to grasp the greatness of the message, while on the other hand we almost always so devalue its practical application to our life, that the result is **a destructive unbelief**. And, the most unusual factor in this process is that **we are largely unconscious of what we are doing**.
- D. Therefore, if we are to grow in our Christian life, we must understand **who we are and how we relate to the promises and provision God has made for us**. If we can become aware of what happens within us when we read and study the Bible -- we can trust God to deliver us, and cooperate with Him as He leads us into freedom.

### I. The Significance of Our Greatness: We are Created in God's Image.

**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Gen 1:27**

A. The pattern of our creation in God's image.

1. **God is a Person** (Note the significance of Genesis 1-3)

God is more than an idea or power. His personhood is affirmed in His functions of creating (1:1); speaking (1:3); seeing, evaluating, separating (1:4); naming (1:5); blessing (1:22); making use of personal pronouns (1:26); defining responsibility (1:28); making provision (1:29,30); and resting (2:2).

To be created in the image of God means to be created like Him -- **a person**.

As a "person" we are a living, finite, spiritual, non-material, substantive individual being, with self-consciousness and self-determination, capable of rational, emotional, volitional and social functions. In our original creation we differed from our Creator in that He is an Infinite Person and we are, and always will be, a finite (totally dependent limited) person. To be a person means we have value and worth. That value and worth was revealed in Gen 1-3 in the way God related to Adam and Eve, gave them certain rights, made provision for them, gave them promises, and held them responsible. Some examples are as follows.

- Gen 1:27 -- To know they were created by God.
- Gen 1:28 -- To be fruitful and have dominion over the earth.
- Gen 1:29,30 -- To have needs and to have them met.
- Gen 1:31 -- To know they were created good.
- Gen 2:15 -- To be alive and to be unique in the creation.
- Gen 2:15 -- To work, to choose, to be responsible.
- Gen 2:16 -- To hear God and choose to obey Him.
- Gen 2:17 -- To choose to obey or disobey God.
- Gen 2:18 -- To have a companion, to love, and know equality.
- Gen 2:19,20 -- To possess gifts and be able to use them.
- Gen 2:21-24 -- To love, to be loved, and to be intimate.
- Gen 2:25 -- To be unashamed and enjoy dignity.
- Gen 3:8 -- To have fellowship with God.
- Gen 3:9,10 -- To be heard when they spoke.
- Gen 3:15,21 -- To receive God's grace and redemption.

**God has given every person all of these rights.** However, we may not be able to receive many of them or use them. And, we cannot selfishly demand our rights. The obvious lesson in this list is that, as a person, we have value and worth given to us by God in our creation as well as an abundant provision for any area of life that would come to us in His will. Every person has equal value. It is quite overwhelming to realize that God treats every person with respect and consideration even though He may have to judge that person for unbelief and rebellion.

Why, if the above material is correct, do we have such a difficult time with self-worth, and are often seriously handicapped by the bondage of inferiority, worthlessness, hopelessness and failure? **The simple answer is that we have accepted error.** Such error may have come to us first of all from the home in which we were raised, and then from many other areas of life. And, Satan our enemy, is dead set against allowing us to know the truth about our value. **How we look upon ourselves profoundly influences how we interpret the Bible.** More will be said about this below.

## 2. God, in His Person, is Spirit.

**God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth.** John 4:24

"As the word 'spirit' has the basic idea of power and activity, the spiritual nature of God refers to the infinite superiority of his nature over all created life... As spirit, God is the living God. He is the possessor of an infinite life in himself ... God is pure spirit. He is fully life ... He is the invisible transcendent living power from whom all derive existence." (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter Elwell, ed., p. 461)

**As spirit, God is the infinite fullness of all life and value. Example: God is infinite holiness, infinite love, and infinite truth (faithfulness).**

- a. As infinite holiness in His character -- God always does what is right. (I Peter 1:16)
- b. As infinite love in His character -- God is always compassionate. (I John 4:7-21)
- c. As infinite truth in His character -- God is always faithful to Himself. (I John 1:5-8)

**To be created in God's image means that we are basically "spirit".**

The word "spirit" tells us the **kind of a person we are**. It is a reminder that we are not primarily body, or mind, or will, or emotions, or a social creature.

Because our basic nature or quality is "spirit" we realize we were created with the ability to know God, to be able to hear Him when He speaks to us, to understand and experience His love, to be able to obey, worship and glorify Him.

Note the simplicity and yet the profound nature of the relationship between God and Adam in Gen 1-3.

Gen 1:28 -- Adam being blessed by God, and given instructions.

Gen 1:29 -- Adam being told of the provision that had been made for his food.

Gen 2:15-17 -- Adam being given instructions and responsibility.

Gen 2:18-25 -- Adam being provided a helper in Eve.

Because we are basically "spirit" -- all the values, abilities, experiences, and human progress related to our mind, will, emotions, body and social relationships **can never bring us true fulfillment/satisfaction**. We have been designed to find fullness of joy only in our relationship with our Creator, Savior, and Lord. Note the significance of Ps 63:3; Is 55:1,2; Jer 2:13; 9:23,24; Matt 11:28-30; John 7:37-39.

B. The instruction in our creation regarding spiritual growth.

Every person has been designed and created with the capacity, need, ability and desire to know God, to understand and experience His love, to glorify Him, to find fulfillment in Him, and to continually grow in many varieties of spiritual relationships. And it is God's express will that we grow in these relationships and experience these benefits.

## II. The Significance of Our Wretchedness: Redeemed but Often in Bondage.

- A. Through the new birth the believer has been **restored**. All that it meant to be originally created in the image of God is now a present reality for every believer.
- B. Because all of the benefits of redemption has not been applied to the believer experientially (we are not in Heaven yet), two important considerations must be kept in mind.
  - 1. We have all of the restored image of God legally -- but those benefits must be developed experientially -- as a part of our daily experience.

**Example:** every believer has the ability and right to understand and enjoy the truth that he or she is loved by God. However, that truth (relationship) is almost completely dormant and without joy, power, and comfort for most believers. The truth of God's love must be understood and the relationship must be developed in daily life and then the joy, power, and comfort of God's love will become a motivating, transforming, and protective reality.

- 2. Because all the benefits of redemption has not yet been applied experientially **every believer has a hindering and enslaving presence of sin within**. As a result, the believer is often **controlled** by wrong priorities, desires, and error.

The practical evidence of this "body of sin" (Rom 6:6) or "law of sin" (Rom 7:23) is often seen in our irrational and shameful attitudes and actions. We, as believers, are too often characterized by sinful anger, jealousy, envy, grudges, selfishness, lust, self-protection, greed, lying, pretense, hypocrisy, pride, and dishonesty to name only a few of our sins.

**Our most serious sins, however, are directly related to the subject of spiritual growth. These sins are far more powerful, irrational, and produce tragic results in our life and in the life of those closely associated with us. And, they are largely the reason why the above list often characterize our life. The type of sin I am referring to has to do with how we fail to respond to God in faith, love, and hope.**

God says, "**Come unto Me ....**" (Matt 11:28; John 7:37).

Too often our response is, "**I don't need to and I don't want to.**" We rarely speak the words "I don't need to and I don't want to" -- but our actions speak even louder and are irrefutable evidence of treating our Lord's invitation in a sinful way. As a result we do not grow and we become callused when we read and hear His invitations.

God says, "**Trust Me .... I promise you ....**" (John 14:1; II Cor 9:8; Phil 4:13,19).

Too often our response is, "**I'm not sure that's a wise thing to do. I'm not sure You are wise enough, loving enough, faithful enough, and powerful enough to do what You have promised.**" We surely would not speak these words -- but our failure to respond in faith, love and hope is ample evidence of our bondage in unbelief.

**Conclusion: What must we do in the light of our Greatness and Wretchedness?**

- A. We may need to repent and confess our sins to God.
- B. We may need the help of other believers by way of encouragement, prayer, Bible study, and accountability.
- C. The most important response we must make is simply: **We must face the truth of our greatness and wretchedness -- stop believing the error so often present in our thoughts and emotions -- break out of the bondage of our passivity, neglect, and unbelief -- and respond to Him in faith, love, and hope. God is worth fighting for.**