

THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF THE BELIEVER

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have prayed and read the Bible for this lesson to learn what the Holy Spirit wants you to teach your students. Then let Him guide you in using these notes. When you follow this procedure you will be a better teacher of your students.

Lesson Aim: Learn how believers are to develop in their spiritual lives so they can please God.

Suggestion: This lesson will call attention to important truths in this week's lesson. After the lesson, give your class next week's Student Lesson so they can share their answers in class next week.

Introduction: Peter wrote about the living hope that believers receive when born again by Christ in chapter one. In chapter two he wrote about the believers' need to grow in their spiritual life. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere (or, pure) milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2).

What hinders our spiritual growth? 2:1

Sin stops spiritual growth. If a person holds on to sin, the Lord will not hear his prayers (Ps 66:18). Peter names five sins that will hinder a person's spiritual growth. They are **malice** (hatred), **guile** (cunning; craftiness), **hypocrisy** (being insincere; concealing one's real motives) **envy** (jealousy of another's blessings) and **evil speaking** (gossip; defaming another's good character). Our spiritual growth springs from a heart cleansed and delivered from these and all sins.

What do baby believers need for spiritual growth? 2:2

For physical growth, we need wholesome food, exercise, clean air and plenty of rest to grow strong. The basic food for babies is pure milk. As they mature, meat will be added to their diet. So believers need the Word of God for food, witnessing and good works for exercise, prayer for breathing the clean air of Heaven and trust in the Lord for rest. The basic food for baby believers is the pure milk of God's Word. Since God's Word is meat for the mature believer as well as milk for the baby believer, what is the milk of God's Word that baby believers need for early growth? Hebrews 5:11-14 speaks about older believers, but they were still babies in their spiritual development. Hebrews 6:1-2 tell us about the milk that these older believers were still drinking instead of the strong meat of mature believers. So what is the milk of a baby believer? Spiritual milk is repentance from dead works and faith toward God (Heb 6:1). In other words, the doctrine of salvation is baby food. That food is an important food for baby believers, but older believers needed to start eating the meat of the Word. Baby food also included the ordinances of baptism and the laying on of hands. It is important to know the meaning and practice of all church ordinances, but this, too, is baby food. Also, resurrection and judgment truths are important for baby believers. While Peter is teaching newborn believers to drink the pure milk of God's Word, he is not suggesting that we be satisfied with the diet of a baby believer for the rest of our lives.

How should we behave as strangers and pilgrims in this world? 2:11-25

Believers are not to yield to the fleshly lusts that war against their souls, but to live godly lives before unbelievers, so that their good works will be a testimony to them. Then when God visits them, they will remember the godly testimony of the believers and be ready to listen to the gospel (11-12).

Believers are to obey the leaders of the country where they live as a testimony to them. This is God's will for their lives. We are to use our Christian liberty to serve others, not ourselves (13-16).

Four commands are given to believers: honor all people; love fellow believers; honor the king (or, president); and fear God (know and highly respect Him) (17). This is a true rule for living as a believer.

Servants (employees) need to submit themselves to their masters (employers) with respect, whether they are good and gentle or cruel to them. If they need to obey God instead of their master in refusing to do something sinful, they are to endure his punishment willingly. Doing this will please God (18-20).

Christ set the example for us when He suffered for doing what His Father commanded. He died on the cross to pay our sin penalty so we could come to God and live righteously by His power (21-25).