

4. Attitudes of the Heart – Growth

Attitudes of the Heart

In the last two lessons in our series on *attitudes of the heart* we dealt with two foundational attitudes – faith and obedience. The Christian’s walk with God can really be summed up as a daily exercise of *faith* and *obedience*. Today’s lesson naturally flows from the previous two. When a Christian man or woman consistently exercises his faith through obedience he will inevitably advance in Christian maturity. This is what we call *spiritual growth*. Growth is our third *attitude of the heart*.

📖 2 Thess 1:3. **Q.** Why did Paul thank God for the Thessalonians?

FAITH GROWS EXCEEDINGLY, CHARITY ABOUND

📖 2 Peter 3:18. **Q.** What two things does Peter tell us to do?

GROW IN GRACE AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST

Peter indicates that *growth* is actually a command from God. God instructs us to grow spiritually and He provides all the means necessary to do so. He expects our hearts to be orientated toward spiritual growth, which makes this a legitimate *attitude of the heart*.

Before we learn more about what spiritual growth is, let’s clear up **some common misconceptions concerning spiritual growth**.

Misconception #1. I must grow in order to be accepted by God

📖 Eph 1:6. **Q.** What has God “made us” by His grace?

ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED

Q. What is significant about the fact that this statement is in the past tense?

IT IS A ONE TIME EVENT WHICH HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE

📖 2 Cor 5:21. **Q.** Why was Christ “made sin” for us?

THAT WE COULD HAVE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

📖 Philippians 3:9. **Q.** Whose righteousness do we have? How did we get it?

GOD’S. THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

We were accepted by God the moment we received Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord by faith. God’s acceptance of us had nothing to do with our worthiness. He accepted us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8), for the “sake of Christ” (Eph 4:32). This acceptance was immediate and irrevocable (Heb 13:5). Having been accepted by God on the basis of Christ’s

righteousness and not our own merit, it makes no sense to attempt to earn His continued acceptance through obedience or spiritual growth.

👉 **Discuss.** *What pitfalls might a Christian encounter if he believes his acceptance by God is dependent upon the rate or quality of his spiritual growth?*

Misconception #2. Growth is always directly related to how long one has been saved.

📖 Job 32:9. **Q.** What *cannot* always be said about “great” or “aged men”?

THAT THEY ARE WISE OR UNDERSTAND JUDGMENT

A Christian’s stage of spiritual growth is not necessarily related to how long he or she has been a Christian. Some grow fast, some grow slow, and some recede in their growth. There should be a definite progression in our spiritual growth all throughout our salvation, but unfortunately this is not always the case.

📖 Hebrews 5:11-14. **Q.** v12. What did the writer to the Hebrews believe they should have been able to do?

BE ABLE TO TEACH OTHERS.

v11-12. **Q.** What was the writer not able to do because of the Hebrew’s immaturity?

UNDERSTAND HARD TRUTHS.

v14. **Q.** Spiritual maturity does not necessarily have to do with time. How does one become spiritually strong?

BY USING OR EXERCISING WHAT THEY DO KNOW. TENDING TO THEIR SPIRITUAL WALK CONSISTENTLY.

👉 **Discuss.** *What could be some of the negative effects of a Christian who has not grown at a rate proportionate to how long he has been saved?*

Misconception #3. Growth and knowledge of scripture are synonymous

📖 1 Cor 8:1. **Q.** What affect can knowledge have on a man?

PUFFS HIM UP – CAN LEAD HIM TO ARROGANCE AND PRIDE

👉 **Discuss.** *Considering 1 Timothy 3:6 how might equating knowledge with spiritual growth lead to problems in the church?*

Head knowledge and spiritual growth are not the same. Growth comes as a man learns scripture, obeys scripture and becomes closer to God as a result. There are many men who can quote scripture and know doctrine who do not have the spiritual wisdom or fruit that accompanies growth. A man who learns but does not grow is susceptible to pride. He can often cause undue discord in the church by his immature reactions to what he perceives to be false doctrine. He has not yet grown to the point where he can handle himself with the grace, meekness or compassion that comes with spiritual maturity.

Leaving the misconceptions regarding spiritual growth, let's move on to a passage of scripture that deals with the *stages of spiritual growth*.

📖 1 John 2:12-14. **Q.** What are the three stages of growth found here?
FATHERS, YOUNG MEN, CHILDREN

There are two different terms for *children* in this passage. The first in v12 seems to encompass all Christians. This is not an uncommon usage in scripture. Jesus, Paul and John all used this term to refer to the people of God (John 13:33, Gal 4:19, 1 John 2:1). Verse 12 indicates that there is something that all children of God have in common regardless of their stage of growth – that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ.

Verse 13 features another greek word translated “children”. This word refers to those Christians who are **spiritually immature**.

Children

📖 v13. **Q.** Why did John write to these “little children”?
BECAUSE THEY KNOW THE FATHER

👉 **Discuss.** *What are some of the characteristics of a physical baby? Using John's analogy, how can we relate those characteristics to an immature Christian?*

A spiritual child doesn't know much. What he does know is that his sins are forgiven and that he has a new heavenly Father. That is pretty well the entire span of his spiritual knowledge – a simplistic understanding that he has entered into a new relationship with God.

Spiritual childhood is a necessary and wonderful stage of spiritual growth. The presence of spiritual babes in the church is an indication that a church is growing and people are getting saved. That being said, when this stage of growth persists for too long it becomes abnormal and even detrimental to a Christian and the church at large.

📖 1 Cor 3:1-4. **Q.** Considering Paul's tone in this passage, what did he *expect* from the Corinthians? What did he find?

HE EXPECTED THAT HE COULD SPEAK TO THEM LIKE SPIRITUALLY MATURE CHRISTIANS. INSTEAD HE FOUND CARNAL, DIVISIVE, IMMATURE CHRISTIANS.

Q. What were some of the evidences of the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians?

THEIR DIVISIONS, ENVYING AND STRIFE. THEIR DEPENDENCE UPON MEN.

As we see in this passage, and as we have already seen in Heb 5:11-14, there is an expected time when a spiritual child should mature. This maturity might happen at a different rate for each Christian, but that doesn't mean there is not an expected rate of spiritual maturity. When a Christian passes this point and remains spiritually immature, there is a good possibility that there is something wrong in his spiritual life. Paul expected a natural progression of growth to take place in the Corinthian's lives, but did not see it. He went on throughout his epistle to correct false doctrine and to rebuke sin. The Christian

who remains immature may have misconceptions, false doctrine or sin in their lives.

📖 Eph 4:11-16. Q. This passage indicates there are gifted men whom God has given to the church. These men are to use their spiritual gifts to mature the church (v12-13). According to verse 14, what is one of the results of spiritual growth? **DOCTRINAL STABILITY. THEY WOULD NO LONGER BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO FALSE TEACHERS AND BAD DOCTRINE.**

Spiritually immature Christians are susceptible to false doctrine. It is easy for them to be led astray by cults or other false teachers (Gal 1:6-7, 2 Cor 11:1-4). Like a child, they lack discernment, are vulnerable and in need of protection from those who would do them harm (1 Cor 4:14-16). They have a basic knowledge of God but have not yet progressed to the point in their *knowledge of the son of God* (Eph 4:13), that they can refute false doctrine or defend the faith.

Young Men

📖 1 John 2:14. Q. For what reasons did John write to the “young men”? **THEY HAVE OVERCOME THE WICKED ONE, ARE STRONG AND THE WORD OF GOD ABIDES IN THEM.**

Q. John indicates that men and women at this stage of spiritual growth have “overcome the wicked one”. How did they do this? **BY ALLOWING THE WORD OF GOD TO ABIDE IN THEM (STUDY, MEMORIZE, OBEY)**

Satan’s chief approach to harming Christians is not through temptation to sin, but through the lure of false doctrine. He often will “disguise himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). This “light” often comes in the form of false doctrine and cults. The spiritual young men have overcome the wicked one by becoming established in their understanding of the gospel through the study of the word of God. These are those who have built upon the emotional and relational aspects of salvation and have added a solid, biblical theology.

📖 Col 2:6-8. Q. v7. What three terms are used here to refer to spiritual stability? **ROOTED, BUILT UP AND ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH.**

Q. v7. The Colossians were to be established in the faith as they had been **TAUGHT**

Learning and applying scripture is the key to spiritual growth. This is the main tool which God has left us to ensure that we mature spiritually. Even the spiritual gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 are really just different ways of ministering the *word of God* to promote spiritual growth.

📖 2 Tim 3:14-17. Q. What four things is scripture good (profitable) for? **DOCTRINE, REPROOF, CORRECTION, INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Spiritual growth depends upon our consistent learning and application of God’s word. Through scripture we learn doctrine, are reproved, corrected and instructed as to how to live righteously. It is through scripture that we are equipped for “every good work”. The spiritual young men have learned this and spend quality time studying the word of God.

📖 1 Peter 2:1-2. Q. According to this passage, how should we feel about the word of God? **WE SHOULD DESIRE IT LIKE A NEWBORN DESIRES MILK**

We will never progress from spiritual immaturity and instability to being firmly grounded in God’s word if we do not have a sincere, heart felt desire to study scripture. The growth of many Christians is stunted because they do not have the right view of the word of God. They have failed to incorporate it into their daily lives and have failed to learn how to study.

👏 Discuss. *Spiritual young men know doctrine. They understand the word of God and are rigid defenders of it. They are ready and willing to go to battle over right doctrine yet they have much growth ahead of them. What are some ways that they might make their immaturity obvious?*

👏 Discuss. *Bible knowledge is necessary to overcome Satan, but it is not enough for full spiritual maturity. What do you think the spiritual young man must have before he can be seen as a “spiritual father”?*

Fathers

 1 John 2:13,14. **Q.** Why did John write to the spiritual fathers?
THEY KNOW HIM WHO IS FROM THE BEGINNING

 Php 3:10. **Q.** What was Paul's desire? **TO KNOW GOD AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION**

Paul was one of the greatest Christian's who ever lived. He was a spiritual father to many churches, yet one of his sincerest desires was to "know God". This speaks of more than a simplistic awareness that God is our father. To "know God" in the sense in which Paul meant it is to have an intimate relationship with Him. These spiritually mature Christians have progressed from a simplistic knowledge of God their father as spiritual children. They have learned scripture and have become defenders of it as spiritual young men. But they have progressed even further by not only knowing scripture but by living it. They have entered into an intimate relationship with God the father.

 **Discuss.** *Considering 1 Peter 5:10 and James 1:2-4, What are some things that may have occurred in the spiritual father's life that has promoted his spiritual growth?*

The spiritual father has experienced answers to prayer. He has endured trials with God at his side. He has seen the word of God proven true over and over again. He not only knows scripture but he has applied it, proven it and lived it. He has prayed for wisdom and has received it. The spiritual father bears the fruit of the spirit and has developed a Christ-like character. He not only *knows* scripture but he has the wisdom and discernment as to how to practice and share it.

 **Discuss.** *How might Christians at each stage of spiritual maturity be an encouragement to one another?*

Review

1. Spiritual growth is not what causes God to accept us but what negative effects might a lack of growth have on our relationship with God?
2. In your own opinion, what types of things might keep someone from growing at a reasonable rate?
3. Have you ever met someone who could quote scripture but was obviously not very spiritually mature? What impression does this leave on people? How could it hurt them?
4. Why do you think Satan chooses to use false religion and false doctrine to lead immature Christian's astray? Why is it effective?
5. Spiritual young men know scripture. They have a solid understanding of theology. Yet in today's church there seems to be very few who really understand doctrine. Why might this be so?
6. How can the church help change this?
7. Why do you think trials and suffering are so effective in producing spiritual maturity?
8. How might a trial in the life of a Christian NOT lead to spiritual maturity?