

## **Maturing in the Lord**

1 John 2:12-14

Last week we discussed how one can test oneself to see if he or she is truly living and experiencing the full abundant life that Christ has offered us.

John has told us that if we claim to know Jesus, then we will obey Him or keep his commands. If we claim to abide in Him, then we will walk as Jesus walked or therefore be Christlike. If we claim to be living in the light, then we will love our brothers. John is not doubting our salvation if indeed we have trusted in Christ but rather has given us a barometer or measuring stick by which to determine if we are growing. This brings us to the next section that we are going to look at today.

**12I write to you, dear children,  
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.**

**13I write to you, fathers,  
because you have known him who is from the beginning.**

**I write to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.**

**I write to you, dear children,  
because you have known the Father.**

**14I write to you, fathers,  
because you have known him who is from the beginning.**

**I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God lives in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.**

**Notice here that John refers to three classes, three stages of growth: little children, fathers and young men. These categories have nothing to do with age or gender, but solely refer to our spiritual growth. You can be 60 years old and still be a baby in Christ. You can be female and be a spiritual father in the sense that these terms are used in this passage.**

**The Bible teaches that there are different levels of spiritual maturity. I'm sure we would all agree that not all Christians are at the same level. Notice that Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:18 to 'grow in grace'. Again in 1 Peter 2:2, we are told to 'desire the pure milk of the word, that we may grow buy it'. In Mark 4:28, Jesus uses the analogy of the growth stages**

**of corn to indicate the mystery of spiritual growth – ‘first the blade, then the ear and after that the full grain’. Paul refers to the ‘weaker brother’ in Romans 14 and Romans 15. Obviously there are different levels of spiritual growth.**

**I believe that is why the Lord inspired John to write these verses that we are looking at today. And it is interesting that he refers to first to children, then to fathers and then to young men. Why not children, young men and then fathers. Well, to me I believe he gives us the start and the finish and then how get there – we start as children and our goal is to fathers and we get there by learning as young men – which is the most important principle of growth. The young men are John’s illustration to us of how we can learn to walk in the light.**

**Let’s look at this closer!**

## **I. Little Children or Babes in Christ (v. 12, 13)**

- a. **All Christians start as spiritual children. They must first be born into God's family. Being a child is not a bad thing – it is a great thing. The Greek word for "children", teknia, which is used in verse 12 refers to people who are born of God (who become Christians) – mere babes. They have experienced God’s forgiveness, they have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. They are alive, they are here. It is just like when we have babies or grandbabies – we are just so excited they are alive. In verse 13, John uses another word, Paidia, which refers to infants, and is associated with ignorance. Our English word pedagogy, which involves instruction, has that Greek term as its root. These children are spiritually uninstructed. Their understanding is limited to the basics of salvation: They know the Father – they are saved. In the natural realm, the first thing a baby discovers is its parents. "Mama" and "Dada" are some of the first words babies can say. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, the distinguishing characteristic of a baby Christian is his acknowledgement of God as His heavenly Father. He expresses his attachment to God. He delights in God and depends on Him. According to Paul in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15, the spiritual**

**babe addresses God as "Abba," (an Aramaic equivalent to daddy).**

- b. 1 Corinthians 3:1 – compares infants to carnal – they could only be fed milk. A child needs the basics to grow. A baby boy or girl, a baby cow, a baby goat – what do they need? Milk! Pure mama’s milk. You don’t expect anything from a baby other than a big smile, a big burp – they cry a lot, they poop and pee alot– because they are babies.**
- c. Ephesians 4:14 – Paul tells us that infants are tossed to and fro by waves. But infants and children will be tossed about because they are not strong enough to stand alone.**
- d. Hebrew 5 refers to three things about babes in Christ:**
  - i. They need solid food so they can distinguish the difference between right and wrong and they therefore are always getting into trouble.**
  - ii. They are unskilled in the ‘word of righteousness’ which would result in right conduct, and**
  - iii. They can not teach others but need to be taught themselves.**
- e. Ever notice that so many Christians often are either on fire or desperate – Praise Jesus or woe is me. WE are saved but we are ignorant – very similar to babies and young children. They are definitely alive, they belong to the family but there are ignorant or naïve. This is the starting point but just as we want our children to grow into responsible mature parents one day to provide and take care of our grandchildren, God wants us to grow into Mature Believers in Christ.**

## **II. Fathers or Mature Believers in Christ (v. 13, 14)**

- a. John uses the exact phrase in both verses 13 and 14 when he refers to fathers. It seems as if that is all that needs to be said about those who are fully spiritually mature. They**

**know Him! Spiritual babies delight in their experiences but fathers delight in God. It's one thing to be a babe in Christ, excited about your faith and desiring to grow in God's word but it's something else to be a spiritual father and know the God behind the page. The spiritual father has plumbed the depths of the knowledge of God. He is doesn't just know doctrine; he knows the God who revealed it. He may spend as much time in prayer as he does in study because he knows the Word and wants to commune with the One who is revealed in it. I wait for the day when I won't have to study all day long to learn the Word because I'll know it. Then I can just spend all day communing with the One behind the Word. A spiritual father has a personal, experiential, in-depth knowledge of God.**

- b. Philippians 3:10 – An in-depth kind of knowledge was in Paul's mind when he said, "That I may know him". Paul sought to plumb the depths of all that God is.**
- c. James 1:2 – Why should we consider it pure joy when we encounter trials – so that we can be made perfect and complete. When John refers to the fact that these fathers have known Jesus Christ, he uses a word which indicates that they 'know by experience'. This person has had his or her life seasoned by maintaining a close and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. They reflect His nature and character in their lives. They have been refined by the fires of life. Remember the story I've told of the silversmith – God has turned up the heat to remove the impurities so that Jesus can see His reflection in these fathers. Look at the trials the apostles went through. God promises us trials and problems because he loves us.**
- d. This is our goal – to become giants of the faith, to be wise, gentle and calm. Nothing stirs us – we are not tossed to and fro. We rest in HIM.**

**But how do we get there?**

### **III. Young Men or Warriors in Christ (v. 13, 14)**

- a. In verse 13, John refers to young men as having overcome the evil one. They are warriors. They are strong. Young**

**men are known for their energy. Young men do the work. Young men fight the battles. Young men make a difference. They are alive and vibrant.**

- b. In verse 14 he repeats again that they have overcome the evil one, but adds this explanation, “you are strong, and the word of God abides in you”. Here in lies the secret to growth – the secret to travel the journey from infancy to fatherhood: The Word of God. This is what will move us from one stage to the next. It is impossible – yes, IMPOSSIBLE – I can not emphasize this enough. It is impossible to to grow up as a Christian unless the WORD of GOD abides in you. Ever wonder why you fall asleep reading the Bible, why it is so difficult to study – because the enemy, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion. He absolutely will do anything to keep us from spending time in the WORD and learning it. Ever wonder why you can just not memorize scripture but you memorize songs and phone numbers and birthdays and recipes and yada, yada, yada... Satan is fighting you and has loosed a constant barrage of attacks when he sees your effort. But the key to overcoming the evil one is the word of God – it must live in us.**
- c. 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.**
- d. So many of us want a quick fix to everything – we want to be spiritual giants but we don’t want to pay the price. We don’t want to do the homework. I hated school – at least I hated doing the homework. I just wanted everything to come to me by osmosis. We want to be zapped by God and instantly changed from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. Growth is gradual. We must recommit ourselves to the word of God.**
  - i. We must read it – not occasionally but daily. Do you have a daily time in God’s word? There are many reading plans out there – there are Bibles that are laid out with daily reading plans so that you can read through the Bible in one year. You and I have no excuse. Don’t know how to read – there are tapes and**

**cd's where the Bible is read to you. You and I have no excuse.**

- ii. We must study it – do you attend a Bible Study? Do you have a study booklet – we have more study aids than ever in the history of Christianity. They are all over the web, you can order them from Amazon, from Christian Book Distributors – I will be glad to buy all of you a study. You and I have no excuse not to study the Word of God.**
- iii. We must apply it – you and I can have all the knowledge in the world but if we don't put it into practice, it can not change us. When you read and study the word, do you ask yourself, “is God saying something to me in this passage” (i.e. story of Abigail coming to David... am I letting God convict someone or am I willing to wait for God to do it – am I playing God?)**
- iv. We must live it – you and I must adjust our lifestyles accordingly. Growth is change – but we as humans are very resistant to Change. Are you willing to commit to live a changed life today?**