

J.J.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1 John 2:12-14

1 Corinthians 3: 1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

*1 John 2: 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.*

INTRODUCTION

One of things you know a person is maturing is when they have to know they have to eat certain food even if it doesn't taste good.

There's this young boy who excited to eat dinner but then he saw "ampalaya" was being served. He was asked to pray before meals and he prayed like this. "Lord, this doesn't look good but don't worry, I'll still eat it."

The first thing we will notice in the passages are that there are four types of spiritual maturity : there are stages – babies, children, young men, fathers.

I. INFANTS

*1 Corinthians 3: 1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address **you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants** in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.*

In short, their actions are still controlled by how they feel, what they think, their appetites instead of being guided by the Word of God (to live by the Spirit)

Quote : *Spiritual maturity is not reached by the passing of the years, but by obedience to the will of God – Oswald Chambers*

II. CHILDREN

*1 John 2: 13... I write to you, dear **children** because you have known the Father.*

Etymology : (paidion – young child), a child that still needs to be trained by his or her father

Quote : A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice, and accountability.” – Henri Nouwen, (Spiritual Direction)

(Show Chart)

What is the purpose of God’s discipline? To increase our faith.
because you have known the Father.

That’s what children to a father is. They are not afraid of anything or worry about anything because the father is with them.

III. YOUNG MEN

1 John 2:13... I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one

1 John 2:14.... 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.

Spiritual young men are spiritually strong because the Word of God is part of their life.

Quotes :

Christians who neglect the Bible simply do not mature - John Stott

The Bible is the divine means of developing spiritual maturity. There is no other way. - Howard G. Hendricks

(Chart)

Infants – Worldly – controlled by their feelings and appetites

Children – Growing - Learning about God’s Word

Young Men - Strong – Living God’s Word

CONTINUATION

IV. FATHERS

PETER PAN SYNDROME : Earlier, we talked about “ADULT BABIES”
Now there’s one less severe and psychologists call it “The Peter Pan Syndrome”

This came from the children’s story of “Peter Pan” and Never Never Land where young boys refused to grow up.

“**Peter Pan Syndrome**” is a popular psychology term describing young adults — particularly males — who cannot seem to “grow up.” - Medical News Today
Now one of the main issues of Peter Pan Syndrome is they have difficulty maintaining healthy relationships.

One of the signs of “emotional maturity” is to maintain healthy relationships with other people.

From a spiritual standpoint, the ultimate sign of maturity has to do with intimate relationship

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

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

We have to answer the two questions here?

- Who is he referring to as “fathers”?
- Who is he referring to as “from the beginning”?

FATHERS

Etymology : “pater”, I mentioned that to you before when we talked about Ephesians regarding how to raise children.

Now that same word, obviously, just like the words “infant”, “children”, “young men” are used metaphorically.

In short, John is referring to “spiritual fathers”.

Who are “spiritual fathers”? They are the ones who have discipled people to follow Christ.

Remember, the Great Commission of our Lord is...

Matthew 28: 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Quote : "We are called to make disciples, not simply converts" R.C. Sproul

Biblical Illustration :

Look at the writers of the Epistles in the New Testament.

John himself at the start of this chapter wrote :

1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

In 3rd John, he wrote to an elder of the church :

3 John 1 The elder,

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Paul himself calls Timothy his "child in the faith"

1 Timothy 1:2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul calls Onesimus, who was a slave who run away from his master Philemon. Paul calls Onesimus his son

Philemon 10:10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

Paul calls the Corinthian church his children. He established the church in Corinth and spent time there, discipling people (Acts 18)

1 Corinthians 4: 14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

A spiritual father is someone who brings up people to follow Christ.

A baby Christian only lives for himself. They do not reproduce other Christians because they still need to be fed.

That's why the writer of Hebrews wrote to those who have been a Christian for a long time and yet are not growing in their faith.

Hebrews 5: 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Remember "teacher" didaskalos, is one who imparts knowledge to others, in this case, the knowledge of God's Word, the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Now, please see the difference :

An infant Christian is being spoon-fed with God's Word.

A child Christian is being trained to be adept in handling God's Word.

Example : When my kids were young, I was teaching them how to shoot the basketball or how to ride the bike or how to drive the car... Now they can do that on their own.

That's why the Young Men Christian is already strong in the Word.

The spiritual father is the one who brings people to a saving knowledge of Christ and then makes sure that they follow Christ and grow mature in Christ.

Look at what Paul wrote in Galatians 4:19 when they were falling back into legalism (in short, thinking that following rules and regulations is the one that gives a person salvation and makes him grow)

Galatians 4:19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Illustration : For me, I don't have a spiritual father. I have a spiritual "father-in-law". It was the dad of my wife. God has used him to lead me to Christ.

Infants – Worldly – controlled by their feelings and appetites

Children – Growing - Learning about God's Word

Young Men - Strong – Living God's Word

Fathers – Disciplers – Imparts God's Word

Which now brings us to the second question we asked earlier?

Who is this person *who is from the beginning?* BY ANSWERING THIS, YOU WILL TRULY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE GROWN MATURE IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE...I SAID GROWN,NOT PERFECT...BUT GROWN.

We all know John is talking about our Lord Jesus Christ here.

Why? It's because that's how John introduced our Lord in the Gospel of John
John 1 : 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Story : I remember when some Jehovah's Witness folks knocked on our door and I gave them this verse because they don't believe that Jesus is God. I mentioned this and they said, that word "Word", means "plan"...And I said, even if you said the Word means "plan" but it says and The PLAN WAS WITH GOD AND THE PLAN WAS GOD AND THEN THAT WORD PLAN WAS CHANGED TO "HE", SHOULDN'T IT BE "IT" AND THEN THAT PLAN BECAME FLESH... and then they left and then I was shouting, "Jesus is God" I think they marked my house because there is no more Jehovah's Witness knocking on my door for years now.

So now you can paraphrase this :

¹⁴I write to you, fathers,
because you have known Jesus Christ who is very God Himself, the Son of God who became Man in order to give us eternal life.

So what does it mean now that you are spiritually mature because *you have known* Jesus Christ?

It means you truly have a relationship with Him.

Illustration:

It's like this, I know who Oliver Lomboy is because I see him every Sunday. I know he cooks very well and dresses well. I know he's a teacher.

But if there's someone who really knows Oliver, it's going to be his wife or his mom or his dad. It's because they have a relationship with him that goes beyond information.

So we know John is talking about the ultimate sign of maturity is to have an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Why? Based on context, we all BECAME CHILDREN when we accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, GOD ENTERED INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

John 1: 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

So one of the meanings of the word "known" in the Bible is to have a relationship.

That's why we know being saved is not about religion but by having a relationship with God. Look at this.

Matthew 7: 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

In short, the Lord is saying, "You don't have a relationship with me." And God enters into a relationship with us once we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour as we have just read in John 1:12

Word of Warning out of love : Some of us might be attending church and yet you are not truly saved. Why? It's because you don't truly have a relationship with Jesus Christ. How do you begin that relationship with God?

*Romans 10: 9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**"*

In short, Lord even in the Old Testament refers to as God. Lord, kyrios, means master. It means you believe that Jesus is God, your master, the one who died on the cross to pay for the punishment for our sins.

And as in any relationship, your knowledge of the person grows more intimate as you spend more time with them.

Again, it's not head knowledge because we already know that John just talked about young men who are strong in the Word.

And people who are truly mature wants to grow in their relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me show this to you in the life of Paul :

Philippians 3: 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way,

In short, for them being a Christian has passed from doing things out of duty –

THEY DO ALL THESE THINGS BECAUSE THEY WANT TO KNOW MORE AND MORE ABOUT OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!!!

Why? It's because we are in a love relationship with Him.

Isn't that what happens when you are in love with someone? We want to know them more. We want to know their likes and dislikes. We do things not out of duty but out of love. They are always in our thoughts.

In short, we serve out of love.

Watch a person who does things out of love and a person who does things out of duty. Watch their demeanor?

A person who does things out of love for Christ, it will always be full of joy and patience. A person who does things out of duty, nakasimangot, nagdadabog, compares themselves to others, looks at others.

Would you like to know if you are truly growing in Christ? Look at this.

1 Corinthians 13 : 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

When we have faith and hope in God but more importantly, we are doing everything out of love for Him.

That's why the Bible says :

1 Corinthians 16:14 Do everything in love.

And why do we do this? It's because we realize and have seen and understand how much God loves us by sending his own Son to die on the cross for our sin so that He can enter into a relationship with us and experience His greatness, His goodness, His love.

We GROW SPIRITUALLY by truly understanding how much Jesus Christ loves us.

1 John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.

Quote : The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God. - Martyn Lloyd Jones

SUMMONS :

Let me end with this story :

One time, me and my family attended the church where Zak attends in Montreal. He introduced me to his friends there and the usual says, "This is my dad." All his friends say laughed in amazement and I was wondering why and someone said, "Now we know why Zak laughs that way. (heartily) You and Zak laugh the same way."

At the end of the day, the reason why we need to grow spiritually and the proof that we are growing spiritually is we become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ BECAUSE WE TRULY HAVE AN INTIMATE LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

S.G.D.