

## THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH—Part 2

### INTRODUCTION:

For those of you who have been here awhile, you know that my “habit” (for lack of a better word) on Sunday mornings has been to preach a **series** of sermons on a given topic rather than go through a particular book of the Bible. We’ve looked at such things as “Questions Jesus Asked,” “The Importance of Love in the Life of the Believer,” and “Understanding and Explaining Biblical Terms.” Although I don’t always know how *many* sermons will be in a series when I begin it, I usually know when I am beginning a series!

That all changed two weeks ago—the last Sunday of 2019—when I began a series on Spiritual Growth—but didn’t realize at the time I was starting a series 😊! I did know last week, however, and probably should have mentioned it. I didn’t, though, so I’m telling you *now*—we are on sermon 3 of a series on Spiritual Growth!

Two weeks ago, we noted from the life of Paul in Phil 3:12-14 that the **process** of spiritual growth begins with a **dissatisfaction** of where we are at. Dissatisfaction is not enough, however—some **decisions** need to be made if spiritual growth is to occur. Paul had a focus on being Christ-like, along with a forgetting of what was behind and a stretching and reaching to what was before. It was not a casual, passive pursuit; instead, it was a stretching out like runners at the finish line. In other words, he put everything he had into it. He “left it on the field,” so to speak—just like I hope the Packers do tonight!

Last week, we looked at **why** spiritual growth—becoming more like Jesus—should be a priority in our lives. Let’s turn again to Ephesian 4:11-12. Reason #1 spiritual growth should be a priority—the one we looked at last Sunday—is because of *The Design of Christ’s gifts to the church*. Of all things that Christ **could have** given the church, He chose to give spiritual leaders.

The One who **loves** the church the most...and who **knows** the church the best...and who can give **anything** because He owns **everything**... gives the “gift” of a Pastor to the church. Why? To equip **you** for the work of the ministry. Spiritual growth is obviously important to Christ and it should be to us, too!

I see 3 other reasons in this passage that spiritual growth should be a priority in our lives. Notice verse 13. I’ll develop this more in a bit, but here we see spiritual growth is God’s **desire** for you as an individual. In verse 14, we see a reason for growth because of the **dangers of not** growing. And in verses 15-16, we see yet another reason for growth—that being the **development of growth** within the body of Christ.

Why grow spiritually?

#### 1. ***It is the desire of God for you as an individual (v 13)***

Look again at verse 13 “Till **we all** come...” let’s stop right there. Who does “we all” leave out? No one, right?! God wants **all of us**—not just a select few—to come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. This is not an easy verse to understand or explain, so please bear with me. I’m going to start with what is the most obvious, and move to the more difficult.

##### A. Maturity desired

Notice the middle of v 13 “unto a perfect man...”

As stated last week, “perfect” does not mean “sinless.” It comes from the Greek word “telios”—which means “finished; lacking nothing for completeness; mature.” God’s desire is that we be “grown-up”—mature—Christians.

--We see that here in v 13 “unto a perfect man”

--We see it in v 14 “That we henceforth **be no more** children”

--We see it in v 15 “But speaking the truth in love, may **grow up** into Him...”

This, of course, is not the only passage in the Bible that speaks of God's desire for our spiritual maturity.

**Colossians 1:28** "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man **perfect** in Christ Jesus:"

**Colossians 4:12** "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, **that ye may stand perfect** and complete in all the will of God."

**II Tim 3:16-17** "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God **may be perfect**, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

**James 1:4** "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye **may be perfect** and entire, wanting nothing.

**I Peter 5:10** "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, **make you perfect**, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

We expect babies to grow, don't we? Today is January 12<sup>th</sup>. Exactly 8 days from now—January 20<sup>th</sup>—my daughter Lydia will be taking a picture of their little girl Cora dressed up in a cute little outfit with a little sign somewhere close by that will read "Cora Joy Brill; 4 months old." How do I know that? Because she did that at 1 month...and 2 months...and 3 months...and I'm pretty sure it will happen for at least Cora's first year! Not surprisingly, when you compare the 1-month picture with the 2-month and then the 3-month picture, one thing stands out—her little girl is growing!

I don't want to embarrass Abbey—and it's not like I'm using a tape-measure or anything—but Abbey's doctor would be worried if she **wasn't** growing. Why? Because is she's not growing, "Henrietta" isn't growing either! (That's not really going to be her name—I don't think 😊!)

Please don't miss the point—just as we expect little babies to grow from babies to toddlers to primaries to tweens to teens to adults, God wants us to grow *out of* spiritual babyhood into spiritually mature Christians. God wants *you to grow* unto a perfect—mature—Christian. Are you growing? Are you wanting to grow?

#### B. Measurement declared

What's the standard? Who are we to compare ourselves to? We know the answer, don't we?

We see it in the end of v 13 "...unto the measure of the stature of the **fullness of Christ**:"

We are to be like Christ—not in age or looks or size, of course—but **in character**. Just as Jesus modeled the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance—we are to be characterized by those same things. Just as Jesus demonstrated obedience and a desire to please the Father, that's what God wants us to demonstrate. And just as Jesus had a burden and compassion and love for the lost, we are to be like Him in that way, too.

#### C. Marks described

As mentioned earlier, I went from the "easier" part of this verse to the more difficult.

Notice the 1<sup>st</sup> phrase; What does "Till we all come in the unity of the faith..." mean?

**i. Unity of the faith.** Commentators give two suggestions.

1) A unity amongst ourselves because of the faith; faith is the bond that ties us together.

2) A unity that comes from believing the same things; agreeing on the same truths. (I tend to think it is the latter).

**ii. And of the knowledge of the Son of God.**

*Knowledge* here refers to not mental understanding—it is not a collection of facts about Jesus. Instead, it means to experience the forgiveness of Christ and fellowship with Christ. It is to talk to Him and walk with Him and have a relationship with Him. In **Philippians 3:10**, Paul says it like this: "That I may **know Him**, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..."

The songwriter C. Austin Miles captured the thought well in the song, "In the Garden."

Chorus: "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."

Why grow? Reason #1—Because it is God’s desire for us as individuals. Reason #2?

## **2. The dangers associated with spiritual immaturity (v 14)**

Notice verse 14 “That we henceforth be no more children...” Does this mean Paul has something **against children**? Not hardly; notice on your sheet what Paul said to the Thessalonians:

**I Thess 2:7-8** “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse **cherisheth her children**:<sup>8</sup> So being **affectionately desirous of you**, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but **also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.**”

--You were as dear to us as our spiritual children as a nursing baby is to its mother!

Some characteristics of children are good, aren’t they? Jesus taught that we need a child-like faith to be saved **Matthew 18:3** “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and **become as little children**, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

**I Cor 14:20** “Brethren, be not children in understanding: **howbeit in malice [evil] be ye children**, but in understanding be men.” In other words, **don’t be child-like** when it comes to thinking and understanding; but **do be child-like** regarding your knowledge and participation in evil.

Paul not only exhorts us not to be like children, he tells us **why**.

### A. Children are unstable—“tossed to and fro”(14a)

The picture here is of a little boat being tossed around on a windy lake. Ever experience that? I’ve been in a canoe on some pretty rough waters before and it is anything but a calm, steady ride. One time a friend of mine and I were in The Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern MN. We had just crossed a pretty good-sized lake and managed to keep from tipping over by either going straight into the waves or going in at an angle. The last thing we wanted to do was get sideways because we were certain we would tip over if we did.

Paul is saying that just as a little boat bounces up and down on a windy lake, people that remain children in spiritual maturity are up and down in their faith.

--They depend on feelings and not facts—just like children often do

--They think because they are “spanked” by God that He doesn’t love them—just like children do

--And they are easily distracted—any shiny new thing they see or new noise they hear draws them away—just like with children!

### B. Children are undiscerning—“carried about with every wind of doctrine” (14b)

Paul continues with the boat-child analogy. A small boat on a windy lake does not just bob up and down—it can easily be *carried away* by the wind. That is the picture Paul is painting here—spiritually immature people can be easily carried away by false doctrine.

Don’t quote me on this because I can’t recall where I read or heard it, but somewhere along the line I remember hearing that many Jehovah Witnesses were formerly Bible-believing Baptists! Again, not sure if that is the case or not, but I do know this—they may have **believed** the Bible, but they certainly didn’t **know it** very well to get sucked into a religion that denies the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the reality of hell! Just as children are undiscerning and put things in their mouth they ought not, the spiritually immature can put the wrong things *in their minds* because they don’t know what is bad and what is good.

Right along with being undiscerning, they are easily deceived. That’s what Paul is saying here, isn’t it? False doctrine carries them away like the wind carries the little boat. But who brings the false doctrine? The sleight—tricks—of men and their cunning craftiness; their cleverness.

What is the best defense against false doctrine? **Knowing the truth**. I know I’ve shared this illustration with you before, but I believe it illustrates the point well. Counterfeit money experts do not become experts by handling *fake* money. Instead, all they do is handle the real thing. And by knowing the real thing so well, they can detect a counterfeit immediately. That should be our approach to doctrine—study the truth and you’ll quickly detect the error!

Why should spiritual growth be a priority in our life? First, because it is God's desire—He wants you to be a perfect—a mature—man. Second, because of the dangers of spiritual immaturity. Lastly, because spiritual growth and maturity...

### **3. Develops growth within the body (vss 15-16)**

Does God want you to grow spiritually as an individual? Yes...but why? Why does God want each one of us to grow? What should our motivation be?

#### A. Motivation for growth is the building up of the whole

Spiritual growth does benefit us—but it's not all about us; it's about the entire body! God wants the whole body to be healthy and grow. Notice God's emphasis on the growth of the whole.

--Last part of v 12 "...for the edifying—building up—of the **body** of Christ"

--V 16 "From whom the **whole body** fitly joined together..."

--End of v 16 "...maketh **increase of the body** unto the **edifying of itself**..."

God does not call us to be rugged individualists—He has placed us in the body because we **need** one another! In I Corinthians 12, Paul gives a detailed explanation how the functioning of a **physical body** correlates with the functioning of individual members **within the church**.

**I Cor 12:20-21** "But now are they many members, yet but one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

So how is the whole to be edified? Is it a matter of us just growing as individuals—or is there more to it than that? There is more to it than that, and Paul next gives us the....

#### B. Manner for the growth of the whole

How are we to relate to one another? How does the whole grow? Paul here gives us three ways.

##### **i. We speak the truth in love**

Verse 15 "But speaking the truth in love...." Our interactions with one another as Christians should be characterized by both truth and love. Stott wrote: "Truth becomes **hard** if it is not softened by love; **love** becomes soft if it is not **strengthened by truth**. The apostle calls us to hold the two together" (NIBC, #10, 246).

While living in Marshfield, on occasion my Pastor would say, "Can I talk to you?" That was his way of saying, 'I have something to tell you that may not be pleasant, but I need to tell you because I love you.'

**Proverbs 27:6** reminds us "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

We need friends like that, don't we? We need people that will "sharpen us" as "iron sharpeneth iron." I mentioned last week in passing that "reproving and rebuking" is not my favorite thing to do as a Pastor and yet it is an important part of being a Pastor. Why? Because my number 1 concern should be your relationship with **God**—not your relationship with **me**!

##### **ii. We submit to the Lord**

Notice the middle of 15 "...may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" Stated another way, we are to "grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ." When **we are all** striving to submit to Christ as the ruler in **all areas** of our life—in our relationships...and in our thought life...and in how we use our money...and time...and talents...and things—the whole church will benefit—not just you as an individual.

--How many churches have been ruined because Pastors wanted the flock to follow **them** instead of the Lord?

--And how many churches have been ruined because **people** wanted to be the **leader** instead of letting the Lord be the leader?

##### **iii. We serve faithfully according to our gifts and role**

Notice v 16 "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part...."

--Who fits the body together? The head, even Christ. Christ is the one who put you in the body, Christ is the one who gifted you with certain gifts, and Christ is the one who expects you to use those gifts for the good of the whole.

Having had knee surgery roughly 3 weeks ago, I was intrigued by the phrase “which every joint supplieth.” A joint, of course, is where two bones meet—but that is not the only thing required for movement. We need the cartilage...and ligaments...and muscles...and tendons...in order for movement to take place and work to get done.

If one of those parts refuses to do its part, movement would stop—or at least not be as efficient as it would be when all parts were working together. There is an emphasis here on each part doing their part—“the effectual—proper—working in the measure of every part.” Each part needs to do their part in order for the whole to build itself up.

Why should spiritual growth be a priority in our lives? First, because it is God’s desire for you as an individual. Second, because of the danger of not growing—you will have a tendency to be unstable and undiscerning. Third, because your growth brings growth to the whole.

***CONCLUDING THOUGHTS/QUESTIONS:***

1. First, are you born again? It is impossible to grow as a Christian if you are not a child of God. And it is impossible to be a child of God by your own efforts—ye must be born again. Those are not my words—those are Jesus’ words! Again I ask—are you born again?
2. Child of God, how serious are you about growing as a Christian? There is no question that God wants it to be a priority in your life; the question is are you making it a priority? Failure to grow doesn’t just affect you. It certainly effects the church, but it also effects your loved ones. If you as an adult are unstable and undiscerning and carried away with wrong doctrine, that affects those around you.