

Tonight we continue in our study of I love 1 John and it's been a wonderful encouragement. We've been seeing the purpose of the book marked for us throughout the first two chapters already.

1 John 5:13

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

We've seen the 3 tests of assurance.

The Three Assurances of Salvation

#1 the mental assurance, cognitive test

#2 the heart assurance, the witness of the Holy Spirit

#3 the behavioral assurance, moral test

We saw last week that one of the major evidences of the Behavioral Test is the fact that you'll heap coals on your mean neighbor's head when he comes to your house asking for help. In other words, people we know we are Christians by our love. We show AGAPE love in how we deal with people. We are right with God in the vertical and right with our fellow man in the horizontal.

1 John 2:10-11

¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And so we've seen that a sure sign that you are a believer in Jesus Christ (according to the Behavioral Test) is that you will love your brother! And now tonight, we're going to move from the assurances of salvation to the Stages of Maturity in our salvation. Follow along with me...

1 John 2:12-14

¹² I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

¹⁴ I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

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

Tonight's message is titled: “The Stages of Spiritual Maturity.” What we've seen are the three stages of spiritual maturity: Children (Gk: Paidia), Young Men (young in the faith) and Fathers (Masculine Noun: Gk: Pater).

The Stages of Spiritual Maturity

1. Children
 2. Young Men
 3. Fathers
-

I want to ask you a question as we begin. Do you think gray hair represents maturity? (It can, but not always.) You see, it's sad to say, but some people never seem to "grow up" spiritually. Old time preacher J. Vernon McGee used to say: "Most churches are nothing more than spiritual nurseries." Ouch!

Let me ask you another question: Are you spiritually mature? Do you have the desire to be spiritually mature?

I would like for you to turn to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11 and I want to show you that our goal as Christians should be spiritual maturity. The Apostle Paul was writing the believers in Ephesus and he was encouraging them as they were living in a very pagan city in a very pagan society to seek spiritual maturity.

Ephesians 4:11-14

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

God's desire is for us to grow and mature so that we don't act like children and aren't deceived by false doctrine. God wants us to grow up! That was His desire with Adam and Eve. He placed them in the Garden to have dominion over the earth and grow in their knowledge and obedience of Him.

Is it your goal to grow and mature in the Lord or are you okay with where you are? If everyone in the church were just like you, what kind of church would we have? How would the offering look? How would the services look? Would you sing? Would you be day-dreaming and not paying attention during the service? Would you work in the church? Based on your level of maturity, how would the church do if everyone were just like you?

Now, I know what some of you are thinking, "You say...Hey...it's Wednesday night...we're here...why don't you preach this on Sunday?" I get it... I really do. Remember, I've not always been a pastor. I know how you feel. I remember being a church member and feeling the weight of carrying so many people who didn't do much in the church.

You know today the 90/10 rule applies. Do you know that rule? It used to be the 80/20 rule. In our church that's about 60-65 who do most of the work. Are you in that number?

Let me show you those categories that John talked about again... Which one are you?

The Stages of Spiritual Maturity

1. Children (all of the saved people)
 2. Young Men (young in the faith)
 3. Fathers (mature in the faith)
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Look at the Scripture again...

1 John 2:12-13

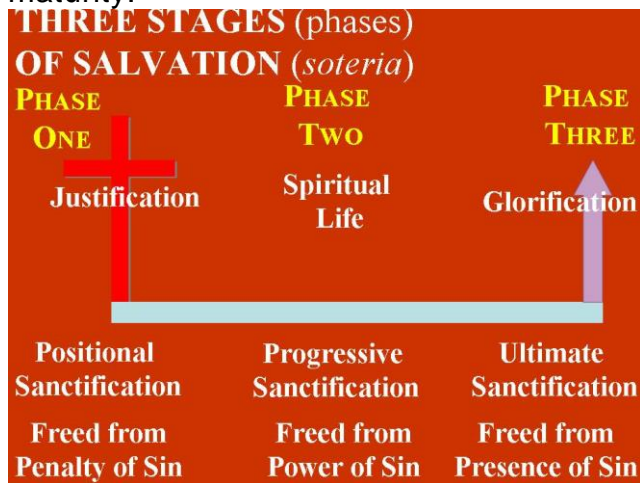
¹² I am writing to you, little children, (Teknia-“born ones” generic term for offspring of any age) because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, (pater, mature believers) because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men, (ney-A-Niss-KOS, not yet fully mature) because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children, (paidia, “immature ones” still under the authority of their parents) because you know the Father.

Do you remember the Three Stages of Salvation? This helps us to understand these stages of maturity.

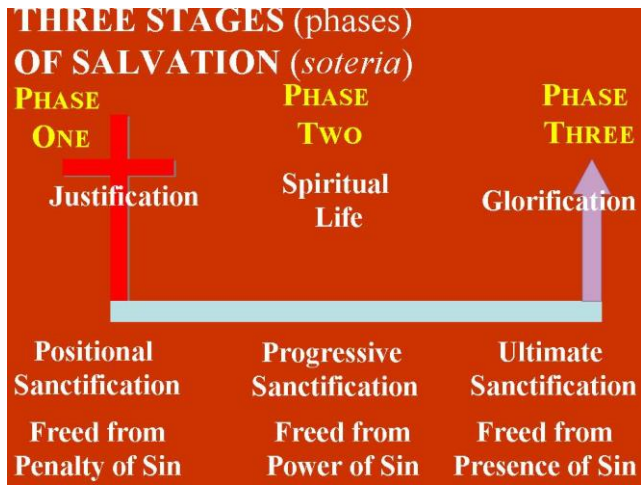


When you come to Christ, you become a Teknia “a child of God.” And then you begin the process of maturing or growing. That’s Phase 2 in your Spiritual Life and you begin to progress and become less and less influenced by the power of sin. You become a “young man” in your understanding and you grow to the point that you become mature as a “Father” in the faith. Let me show you this as Paul described it... (child-Nepios...one not of age, a minor)

1 Corinthians 13:11

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

The goal is to grow... and that means sin is having less and less effect on your life. See it again... “Freed from the Power of Sin...”



That's the grace of God!

Turn to Romans 6 and let me show you a person who is growing in the Lord. That person is overcoming sin. They are more and more being freed from the power of sin in their lives and it's all because they are allowing the grace of God to work in their lives.

Romans 6:1-14

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The goal is to grow, and become more and more free from sin so that it has no dominion over us...we become like Jesus. Remember...

1 John 2:5-6

⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

How did Jesus live? Remember the stages of His life? At the age of 12 He said, "Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business." And then Luke records this...

Luke 2:51-52

⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

You see, in Scripture there is this season of time that you go beyond being a child to becoming a young man, as John calls it. So, let's see the transition again...

The Stages of Spiritual Maturity

1. Children (all of the saved people)
2. Young Men (young in the faith)
3. Fathers (mature in the faith)

Now, how did John describe a person who was maturing in the faith? A YOUNG MAN, see it...

1 John 2:14

¹⁴ I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

Why were they growing? Because the WORD OF GOD abides in them. Here's the word:

Abide:

Abide: (Gk: Meno):

To remain; to continue to be present; to be held, kept, continually

Is the Word of God present with you and being held and kept continually? If so, then you are growing and maturing in the Lord.

Listen, I've never seen a person who I would describe as a mature believer who was NOT a student of the Word of God. In fact, I can say it this way... There is almost a 1 to 1 direct correlation between a believer's maturity and the amount of time they spend in the Word of God. You show me a mature believer and I will show you a person who is MENO. See it again...

Abide: (Gk: Meno):

To remain; to continue to be present; to be held, kept, continually

Are you in the Word of God? If you are, you are going to be so much better equipped to deal with life and the struggles of life and you will be settled and stable and consistent. Are you a student of the Word of God?

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Here's a problem though...



Earlier today I watched an interview with Barna Research and Jason Malec, the head of US Operations for the American Bible Society about the “The Changing Perceptions of the Bible in the US.” And here’s what they’ve found: Americans have 3.7 Bibles per household. But, here’s what I want you to hear. In the last 6 years, according to the ABS, those who read the Bible (called actively engaged, 3-4 times per week) has dropped from 21% to 17% and those who are “Skeptical” about the Bible has risen from just 10% to 21% in just 6 years. Those who are skeptical say the Bible is: “old, boring, hard to understand, irrelevant and is “anti-me and my friends,” meaning: “the Bible makes me feel bad about myself and the people I love because it’s not accepting or tolerant of all lifestyles.”

So, do you read it? Do you feel it should be a part of your life? Are you like the Bereans who studied the Scriptures daily?

Think of it like a diet...

What is your spiritual diet? Are you feeding yourself daily, or are you Anemic? You see, your spiritual growth has a direct correlation to your time in the Word of God. Remember sound doctrine helps you overcome Satan.

So where are you? Where are you on this continuum of maturity?

The Stages of Spiritual Maturity

1. Children (all of the saved people)
 2. Young Men (young in the faith)
 3. Fathers (mature in the faith)
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Hey Mom and Dad with children: are you raising godly young women and men? Is your goal to get them to spiritual maturity? Are you training them and creating in them an appetite for the Word of God? Remember, what you do in moderation, they’ll take to excess. What are your spiritual goals for your children? Do you expect them to DO HARD THINGS spiritually? I know you do in school and on the ball fields, but what about spiritually? Do you have a desire for them to know the Word of God? Would they be willing to stand up and teach it?

I know if they're a senior in High School that you expect them to do their Senior Project before the panel...but would they be willing to stand up and give a testimony about Jesus or even teach a passage of Scripture? Or would you let them opt out?

Mom and Dad, it takes time to teach and train your children spiritually, but that's what God expects and that mandate goes all the way back to Genesis and Abraham...

Genesis 17:7-9

⁷And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations."

You see, we've got to teach the commands of God to our children ALL THE TIME. We saw this last week...

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Parents, do we have any spiritual expectations for our kids? Listen, mom and dad... Our young people will rise or FALL to our level of expectations... You expect a lot you get a lot...you expect a little and you get a little. They are not going to value the mission any more than you are. They are watching you and how you live and what you value.

But, young person, you have a responsibility if you are a believer to grow yourself, no matter what level of commitment your parents have. Paul told Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:12

¹²Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Church family, we should desire to move from the milk to the meat. We should desire to grow and progress to become "Fathers," mature believers. **The goal is to get to stage 3.**

The Stages of Spiritual Maturity

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