“Growing Up In Christ”

May 24, 2015

What comes to you mind when you hear the phrase “Spiritual maturity? Here’s what comes to my heart when I read the phrase. “I am growing into Christ-likeness as I surrender myself to God and let Him accomplish His will in my life.”

When was the last time you seriously considered your own level of spiritual growth? That’s what’s on my heart today. So, I’ve titled today’s sermon “Growing Up in Christ.” Shall we pray?

Amy Carmichael wrote “There is no sudden triumph no spiritual maturity.”

I’d like to have you open your Bible with me to Acts chapter nine; to the personal testimony of the Apostle Paul. And please look with me at verse twenty.

Now, before I read these words, I want to say this. None of us here can or should compare ourselves to the Apostle Paul. And second, none of us can claim to have the same experience Paul had after his salvation. But we are similar. And God does work in similar ways in our lives. So, some of the things taught here will. I am sure, be used of the LORD to minister to your heart in the matter of spiritual maturity.

Acts 9:20 *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. (21) But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*

*(22) But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. (23) And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: (24) But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.*

*(25) Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. (26) And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.*

*(27) But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. (28) And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”*

One servant of the LORD said this about growing up in Christ. “… Human nature needs problems more than solutions. Why are not all prayers answered magically and instantly? Why must every convert travel the same tedious path of spiritual discipline? Because persistent prayer, and fasting, and study, and meditation are designed primarily for our sakes, not for God's.” (Disappointment With God” by Philip Yancey).

Today, what are some specific things that will be found in the life that is growing in Christ?

Here are some questions that only you can answer.

First, are you getting the word out to others?

Look again at verse twenty. *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.”*

Does it surprise you that Paul so quickly after salvation sets out to preach Christ in the synagogues? There’s no doubt the Apostle Paul had a vast knowledge of the OT Scriptures when he was saved. But, don’t you remember what it was like for you in those first weeks after you came to know the LORD?

What I remember is this. I was anxious to tell everybody, anybody, my family, my friends, you name it – tell them what had happened to me and get the message to them. So, Paul’s actions here aren’t that different from yours or mine, are they?

And consider this. God chose to use Paul’s Pharisaical studies to get the Gospel out to the lost world.

In a book by Dr. Dave Breese called “Living for Eternity” you will find these words. “Though many of us have seen pictures of a huge eagle's nest high in the branches of a tree or in the crag of a cliff, few of us have gotten a glimpse inside. When a mother eagle builds her nest she starts with thorns, broken branches, sharp rocks, and a number of other items that seem entirely unsuitable for the project. But then she lines the nest with a thick padding of wool, feathers, and fur from animals she has killed, making it soft and comfortable for the eggs. By the time the growing birds reach flying age, the comfort of the nest and the luxury of free meals make them quite reluctant to leave. That's when the mother eagle begins "stirring up the nest." With her strong talons she begins pulling up the thick carpet of fur and feathers, bringing the sharp rocks and branches to the surface. As more of the bedding gets plucked up, the nest becomes more uncomfortable for the young eagles. Eventually, this and other urgings prompt the growing eagles to leave their once-comfortable abode and move on to more mature behavior.”

Very soon after Paul became a Believer, we find this; verse twenty. *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.”*

“Straightway” usually means “immediately.” Of the 80 times this term is found in the NT, 32 times it is translated as “immediately” in the KJV.

Obviously something; actually many things; change once you receive Jesus as your personal Savior and LORD. And one is this. You want others to hear the message that has changed you.

What does growing up in Christ mean to you? Doesn’t it mean that you have a new heaven-sent desire to get the word out to those who don’t know the LORD Who has saved you?

Saul had repented. He had changed his mind and his life is now completely transformed from a Pharisee who once despised both Christians and Jesus Christ to one who preached the one message he had previously hated.

First, then, are you getting the word out to others?

Second, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

Now, consider this. I know Christ lived. I know He was a great teacher. I know that He was crucified on a Roman cross. I know He was raised from the dead.

But if all I know about Christ is a number of facts, that is not salvation. Nor is it growing up in Christ. That is information. And yes, information is extremely valuable when it comes to walking with the LORD. But salvation is a matter of the heart much more than it is a matter of the head.

Paul came to “know the LORD.”

II Peter 3:18 *“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”*

Can you see and hear the LORD’s command here? He commands all of us to “GROW in grace and in the knowledge of Christ.”

Not only does the LORD save you on the day you repent and believe; He also sets you on the road of getting to know Him. This is the command of the Holy Spirit. II Peter 3:18 *“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”*

So, child of God, are you growing up in Him? Are you growing up in knowing Him?

Here’s the way he phrased it in a letter he wrote to the Church in Philippi. Philippians 3:7 *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for* ***the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord****: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,*

*(9)**And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (10)* ***That I may know him****, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;…”*

Of all the things that have changed since I came to the LORD, this must certainly be the greatest. I am growing up in Christ. How do I know that? I’m growing in my relationship to Jesus Christ. I’m getting to know Him more and more as the days and years go by.

Listen to Jesus on this topic. John 17:3 *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”*

You see; the LORD wants you to know Him; and to know Him more and more; and to know both the Father and the Son is having eternal life. Keep in mind that He’s the infinite One. You are the finite one. And this Infinite God wants you to grow and keep on growing in your personal knowledge of Him. Folks, there’s no end. You can keep on getting to know the LORD more and more and more.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote this in his book “God’s Ultimate Purpose.” “Our supreme need is to know God.”

You’ve heard this, I’m sure. And you’ve very likely said this yourself. “Being saved is having a personal relationship with God.” If you truly believe this, then you will do all you know to do to get to know Him. This, as you can see, is essential to growing up in Christ.

The best thing I can compare this growing to is the growing relationship between Janet and I. Couldn’t we both say that we knew each other during the first ten or twelve years of our marriage? Yes. But we would both happily tell you that we continue to increase in our knowledge of each other.

Once you’ve come to Christ, everything in your life is changed by this new relationship. So, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

First, then, are you getting the word out to others?

Second, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

Third, are you increasing in strength?

Look again with me at Acts chapter nine. Acts 9:22 *“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.”*

Most of us know that the time we increase in strength is when we exercise. And if we apply that same principle to our spiritual lives, we know that our strength in the LORD increases when you apply what we learn regarding the Christian life.

Nehemiah 8:10 says this. *“…the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*

I’ve found that the greater the joy in the LORD, the greater my personal strength. Lose your joy and lose your strength. And with strength you can stand against all the deceptions of the wicked one.

Paul teaches us this in Ephesians 6:10 *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. (11) Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles [deceptions] of the devil. (12) For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,*

*against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (13) Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

Folks, it’s His strength that you and I need. You’ve already got your own strength. And, practically speaking, that’s not enough. We are never strong in ourselves enough to deal with the things in our lives. But He is.

And one of the secrets to strength is this. Galatians 2:20 *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

You see, it’s Christ Who lives in you. Yes, He loved you. Yes, He died for you. But, even more; He lives in you. And each time you have a need for strength; each task you face; each day or each hour of your day; turn yourself over to Him. Remind yourself Who is it that lives in you. Do it a hundred times a day if you need to. Apply the truth of Galatians 2:20 to each circumstance and you’ll see the strength of the LORD rise up in you.

First, then, are you getting the word out to others?

Second, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

Third, are you increasing in strength?

Fourth, are you facing opposition?

Look again at Acts 9 and verse twenty-three. Acts 9:23 *“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: (24) But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. (25) Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.”*

You should never be surprised when resistance and conflict come your way. Opposition seems to appear daily to the Christian who’s growing up in Christ. Here’s Paul at the very beginning of his walk with the LORD. And he immediately faced opposition.

Now, haven’t you ever wondered why the LORD allows so much opposition in the life of a Christian who simply wants to grow closer to Him?

Someone has said this about opposition. “The will of God always includes opposition.” Humanly speaking, wouldn’t it be better for the growing Christian if he or she didn’t have any opposition?

Can I answer that in one simply word. There will always be opposition to God’s will. If you choose to abide in *His* will, then you can expect opposition. Can you expect the world to accept His will at work in you? Folks, the world and those who refuse to do the LORD’s will are simply taking on the will of God. And do you think anyone can really stand in opposition to the LORD’s will and succeed?

Here the Apostle Paul was simply telling the Good News to the Jews in the town synagogue. Yet, opposition arose just as sure as the sun comes up in the morning. Opposition, folks, is one of Satan’s many tools to dishearten and discourage the Christian. And a growing Christian will experience it.

First, then, are you getting the word out to others?

Second, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

Third, are you increasing in strength?

Fourth, are you facing opposition?

Fifth, are you misunderstood?

Look again at Paul in Acts nine. What a time it must have been when the Early Church saw Paul become a Believer in Christ. There must have been some huge collective sigh of relief. No longer was Paul going from town to town, uncovering who the Christians are, and then arresting him and putting them in jail.

Yet, here’s what we read in verse 26. Acts 9:26 *“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed [attempted] to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”*

Who is it that refused and rejected Paul? It was the very disciples who had prayed for his salvation. Now, saved, and beginning to grow up in the LORD, Paul is rejected by the very ones who should have accepted him. But he wasn’t.

Folks, you and I are prone to being misunderstood. Motives been misjudged? Actions been misinterpreted? Here’s an answer to build you up when you are being misunderstood. Ask yourself this “Is what I are doing pleasing or displeasing to the LORD? Haven’t you found that those very things that are pleasing to God are a source of misunderstanding to those who aren’t at all interested in honoring Him? You see, your first line of defense is the One Who really knows your heart. And He knows it very well. So, have you presented yourself to Him? If you’ve yielded your heart to Him and have surrendered to His will, then misunderstanding is to be expected.

No, don’t go out looking to be misunderstood. Don’t go doing things at home or at work that call for people to misunderstand you. It will finds its way to your doorstep soon enough.

Now, go back with me to the Person of Jesus. Wasn’t He perfect? Didn’t He always have the right motives? Wasn’t He the best teacher ever? And did He or did he not always please His Heavenly Father? And, was He or was He not misunderstood? Yes, He was. Sometime this week read through the Gospel of John and note how many people and how many times Jesus was misunder-stood. It will amaze you. Jesus, just like Paul here, lived with people misunderstanding Him.

First, then, are you getting the word out to others?

Second, are you getting to know the One Who saved you?

Third, are you increasing in strength?

Fourth, are you facing opposition?

Fifth, are you misunderstood?

Sixth, are you being encouraged?

Look one more time at Acts nine. Acts 9:27 *“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*

Fortunately for all of us, we have our encouragers. And every Christian needs an encourager as he grows up in Christ. The LORD will not leave you alone. As you are growing up in Him, note the ones He sends along to encourage you. They are sent from His heart to your heart to inspire you when you need that encouragement and comfort.

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Can you see the growth in your own life? If not, it may be that you have not yet experienced salvation. You are still in your sins and have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Maybe you’ve heard the Gospel story many times. Yet, you’ve never put your personal trust in Him.

Isn’t it obvious that you can’t grow up in Christ if you are not “in Christ”?

The Good News; the Gospel is simple. Yet, we are so sinfully stubborn. We want our own way.

Actually the Bible says that we have turned to our own way. Yet the LORD has laid upon Christ all your iniquities. Isaiah puts it like this. Isaiah 53:6 *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

Jesus came into this world to become the Substitute for your sins and take the penalty that you deserve for the sins you’ve committed. He went to the Cross. He shed His blood. He became the Superior Sacrifice for your sins. He paid a debt you could not pay to grant you a life you could never earn.

And today He offers you His free gift of eternal life.

Here’s the Bad News. You are a sinner and destined to Hell because of you sins.

And here’s the Good News. Christ died in your place at Calvary. He was crucified for our sins. I Corinthians 15:3 *“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;…”*

In closing, what is it that the LORD is speaking to you about? If He has spoken to you, do the one thing that is the best thing: submit your heart to Him. Let Him have His way.]

I offer you again the opportunity to pray the Sinner’s Prayer. “LORD, I admit I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the cross. I repent of my sins. I want to be completely forgiven today. I am trusting you right now to save me. Thank you. Amen”

And for you that you are already a Christian, I offer you again the opportunity to pray the Prayer of Surrender.

“LORD, I surrender everything that I am, and have, and ever will be. I take my hands off of my life and release every relationship to You--every habit, every goal, my health, my wealth, and everything that means anything. I surrender it all to You. And by faith I take my place at the Cross,

believing that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, according to Your Word, I was crucified with Him. And from this moment on I am trusting You to live Your life in me and through me that You might receive all the glory. I thank You now by faith for accepting me in the Lord Jesus.” Found on [www.gracenotebook.com](http://www.gracenotebook.com) in “The Selfer’s Prayer” by John Woodward].