

BIG PROBLEMS? BIGGER GOD!

Part 19: Problem of SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

INTRO: Who grew up with growth charts to measure height over time? Barring disease physical growth is never instant, but expected and almost automatic (grandson James daily growth shots). Growth into spiritual maturity, like the physical, is also a process, never instant nor easy, but essential to reach our potential as Christians. The biblical term for the process is *sanctification*, where we are slowly becoming more like Christ. *Every* believer is unfinished, and under-construction, work in progress (Phil. 1:6). Prolonged spiritual immaturity, where we get “stalled” and stagnate—maybe even stuck, is a problem, even a tragedy. Biological birth is a crisis followed by a process, so is marriage—as is the Christian life. Spiritual growth is a choice, never automatic. M.E. Dodd, “Conversion is 5% of the Christian life 95% is going on in Christ.”

I. WARNINGS AGAINST PROLONGED IMMATURITY

- A. Three (3) Scriptures (Eph. 4:14; 1 Cor. 3:1-4; Heb. 5:11-14)
- B. Evidence of immaturity: dullness to Word, little sharing, lack of discernment, inconsistency, instability, etc. Prolonged spiritual immaturity (“stalled”) could be the church’s greatest scandal. Millions of Christians are in pause mode, stalled—so sad and unnecessary.

II. MANDATES TO GROW

- A. Growth toward maturity isn’t an option, it is essential, but deliberate choice is a must
- B. Passages: Eph. 4:14-15; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:3ff; 3:18

III. STAGES OF GROWTH (1 Jn. 2:12-14)

Remember: Sanctification (becoming more like Christ) is a life-long journey with no shortcuts. v.12 “little children” is *tekna*. All whose “sins are forgiven” are God’s children – and always will be (like our children no matter their age). All believers are *tekna*. Yet, God’s children are at different *categories of spiritual maturity*:

- v. 13c “children” is *paideia* – Beginners in Christ who only “know the Father” (like infant with parents). They are *experientially* driven and are spiritually ignorant and need to learn God’s Word. About 30%.

- “young men” (vv. 13b, 14b) are Growing in Christ. They have good working knowledge of Scripture, esp. of “the evil one” and his workings, since “the word of God abides” in them. These are *biblically* driven. About 35%.
- “fathers” (vv. 13a, 14a) “know Him who is from the beginning.” They intimately know the One who revealed the knowledge (Scripture). They are *worship* driven. About 35%.

IV. MEANS TO MATURITY

- A. What’s the Goal? More activity? Busyness? More about intimacy than activity. Christlikeness is the goal.
 - 1. Passages (Matt. 10:24-25; Lk. 6:40; 1 Jn. 2:28-3:3; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:13-15; Phil. 3:13-14)—Loving God and others.
 - 2. God’s goal is Christlikeness in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Again, a long process which is more concerned about direction than speed. More about choice than time.
- B. Means to?
 - 1. Desire: want-to attitude (1 Pet. 2:2 “long for”)—Usually, motivated by a need to KNOW something or to GROW through something.
 - 2. Discipline, Self-control (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:7) – don’t just try, but “train” in a few key habits (not perfection, but direction) – loving, serving, generosity, obeying, telling, etc.

CONC: Don’t just grow old in the Lord, grow up in Him. It takes a lifetime, yet never fully arrive. God is always at work (Phil. 1:6). As I said, “All under construction” (long, loud, noisy, messy, etc.). But one day we’ll be just like Him.

ILLUS: Ruth Graham’s tombstone: “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.” I repeat: Let’s not just grow old in the Lord, let’s grow up in Him!