

Growth

We have been speaking these last couple of weeks about building.... first the need for a secure foundation..... second; our Biblical mandate to build one another up.... today our third; to grow.

If we are to accept all of our responsibilities as “Followers of Christ”, Christians, Disciples, then the very nature of being children of God implies growing up..... ultimately into “Christ-likeness”.

Even though the first disciples answered the call of Jesus to follow Him, they at that time knew nothing of His plan. They had a Jewish interpretation of what their future may hold in God. They were after all Jews and would have been reasonably well versed in what we now know as the Old Testament. Jesus came to fulfill what they had not then understood, to fulfill OT prophecies concerning Himself, to show the way back to God the Father, to teach them a new way, to finish what had been started.... and ultimately to die for our sins. He came to pay the price that we should pay, to answer the call of love from the Father to all the nations on the earth. He did what we could never do for ourselves.

But that doesn't absolve us of responsibility to God. There is no room in His Kingdom for sloth, idleness, ignorance, stagnation, or complacency.

We are all called, as those first disciples were, to growth.

Back then Jesus taught them daily, by word of mouth, by practical examples, by lifestyle, and from the Scriptures.

They grew in knowledge, wisdom, grace, faith, works, and best of all they grew into disciple-makers. We have the written record of how it all happened.

Are you a disciple today?

Are you complete in every way? Are you yet perfect? Then will you answer the call to growth?

2 Peter 3:14-18 *Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the **grace and knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-16 *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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, **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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up** in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

We are to attain maturity...we begin as children.... we are to be trained by God's appointed leadership ...and become mature Christians. We are to “grow up” so that the whole church can function properly and grow itself.

So how do children grow in all these things?

First, there is usually a measure of **obedience** called for in class!

Hopefully this is coupled with a necessary **respect** for their teachers

Often, way before understanding is fully attained; they will **simply try to do** the task, to practise,

sometimes failing many times before a measure of success is achieved.

As they do the task mechanically, following the teachers instructions, often **copying** what he does, they **begin to see** the principles at work. Experimentation is acceptable!

Eventually they will be set problems to solve by the teachers to see if they can apply the principles in varying ways. With problem solving often comes true understanding. With true understanding will come wisdom.

When a student gains all the knowledge imparted by his teacher, if eager for more, he will either seek out a more knowledgeable teacher, and maybe eventually teach what he knows to those around him who don't know what he knows. The disciple should eventually become a discipler.

So are we at least behaving like children should?

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Hebrews 13:7 *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9 *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.*

We may never cease learning and growing, but we can all attain a measure of growth... sufficient to do the good and right things through what we have **learned** and not completely by rule, blind obedience, or simple imitation.

We can all reach a *level* of maturity. We can never attain **all** truth, **all** knowledge, **all** wisdom, **all** grace, **all** mercy, **all** faith.....not in this life.

But ... we must put into practise that which we have gained, or it is of no use to man nor God.

2 Peter 1:5-10 **make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing**, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so near-sighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, **for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.**

There's an old saying - "Practise makes perfect". Repeatedly doing something can make us falsely religious, but only if we forget our **motivations**. We should be doing everything out of love for a God who did everything to restore us to Himself, and simply asks that we take up the task of completing the work here on earth, with His help, so that everyone may have the chance that we did - to hear, to believe, to receive, and to know Him.

Therefore - if we are to grow, how are we to know if we *are* doing? Someone needs to measure!

Did your mum or dad ever stand you against a wall when you were growing up, and perhaps make a mark on the wall, or a doorpost, with a date?

The oddest thing is that we rarely can measure our own growth. Usually other people are the first to notice our growth!

What good teacher would **assume** that his students are gaining understanding?
Would he not examine them before moving them up a class?
Did not even Jesus set His disciples challenges so that they may know themselves better?

Luke 9:1-6 *And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*

Does this sound like a walk in the park to anyone?
Do you think perhaps He wanted to see what they had learned from Him so far?
Why go *without* any provision for the journey?

So then how shall we be measured?

Will we allow those in authority over us to examine our "walk" and maybe find our weak spots?

Will we see that as intrusive, as interfering? Or will we see that it is for our own good?

How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus questioned them? Embarrassed? Awkward?

Or maybe they understood His heart of love for them, and they submitted to Him out of respect, love, and honour? As good disciples of a good teacher? As those wanting to learn and grow up into all things?

If we are immature, we should accept our lowly position humbly and be eager to learn of God and His ways, and eager to grow and become mature.

If we have attained some measure of maturity we should be seeking ways to serve, whilst still growing.

If we just want to keep our heads down and be insignificant for God we are denying His best for us, ignoring His word, and missing our calling.

Yes - God is patient - but not forever!

Yes - God is graceful - to cover our weaknesses, not our strengths!
As He has given us gifts and skills we should use them for His Kingdom!

Yes - God loves us as we are. But - if at 18 years old your son was still being spoon fed, then something is very wrong!

If we are disciples then we should be seen to be growing, and neither be embarrassed or shy about our gifts, or lack of them, our knowledge or lack thereof.

In fact any or all of our virtues or failings should be up for open discussion with those in Godly authority over us.

So should we fear examination in the church body? **We should not.**

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no **advantage to you.***

Submit in this context means to *yield* or *surrender*. Stop fighting (if indeed you are!) and allow your leaders to fulfill their call and gifting, **for your own good** and benefit in God. Don't be embarrassed or humiliated if we ask the hard questions....!