

Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 8
CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10
Title: **“Faith For Fall”**
1 John 2:12-14 ~ May 2, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To encourage believers in their faith by discussing the different levels of spiritual growth.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Youth PM – tonight – prayer gathering at 5 p.m. due to Youth PM
- Mother’s Day gift...Michelle Racioppo to annc. – Women of Faith Conf. – tickets available in courtyard

Opening Prayer

What is the point of the Christian life?

Are we saved for the sake of salvation itself? Is our salvation - our conversion both the original and final work of God in this life? For many people, they believe their conversion is the first and final work of God in their life. They never realize the call of God on the Christian’s life.

There are several ‘points’ of the Christian life, but...

A primary point for Christians is to be like Christ.

Each of us is called to emulate Jesus’ attitudes and actions. This is what we call Christian maturity.

1 Cor. 11:1 (words of the Apostle Paul)

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Rom. 8:29

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...”

Eph. 4:13 (why we have pastors, teachers, etc.)

“...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Christian Maturity = Christ-likeness

Common misconceptions about spiritual growth/maturity:*

1. It does not determine your status before God
You do not gain more grace or forgiveness as you mature in Christ. All your sins – past, present, future are forgiven and you are imputed with the righteousness of Christ at the moment of your conversion.
2. It does not increase God’s love for you
God does not love the mature believer more than the immature believer.
3. It is not connected to your age
Older Christians are not automatically more spiritually mature than younger Christians. Chronological maturity is not an automatic indicator of spiritual maturity.
4. Biblical knowledge does not guarantee spiritual maturity
Biblical knowledge is key to spiritual growth – but biblical knowledge is not equivalent to spiritual growth. There are believers who have a tremendous grasp of biblical doctrine – of the truths contained in Scripture – but the truth has not infiltrated their heart – it’s locked in their mind only. They know the truth but they don’t live the truth. One must know the truth of God – the doctrines of the faith to mature in the faith, but knowledge alone is not spiritual maturity.
5. Ministry success does not reveal spiritual growth

Just because someone is successful in ministry does not mean they are spiritually maturing. Ministry success can be the result of many things and is not necessarily connected to a leader's spiritual growth.

6. It is not an *emotional* or *psychological* process

Maturing in the Christian faith involves your emotions (primarily your control of them) and may involve your psychological health, but is not limited to or attributed to these things. Spiritual maturity is related to God's truth and our obedience and submission to it. Spiritual maturity is directly related to our willingness to apply the truth and grace of God into our life – how we think and how we live.

(* List is from [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#), by John MacArthur, p. 70-71)

Spiritual growth is achieved as we learn the Word of God – as we learn about God and Christ through the pages of the Bible – and as we apply those truths into our everyday life. Spiritual growth is achieved as we sin, and repent from our sin (1 John 1:9) and continue to 'work out our salvation' – (Phil. 2:12).

Read 1 John 2:12

“dear children” – *teknia* – not a reference to infants or immature – means “born ones” – often used in the N.T. as a term a teacher uses in addressing his students / disciples. I will always be a *teknia* in my relationship to my parents.

John is using this term in the sense that every Christian is a child of God.

John then states that their sins have been forgiven – every child of God has been forgiven of their sins – this is universally true of all believers – they are all forgiven by God...Why?

On account of His name. For God's glory is what this phrase means. God chooses us, draws us to Himself and forgives us so He will be praised. He receives the praise from His children who realize the forgiveness they have but don't deserve.

Psalm 25:11 "For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great."

Three levels (stages) of Christian maturity. vs. 13-14

This is a difficult passage to interpret – historically there is a wide range of interpretations taken by theologians throughout the centuries because of the style and terms used by John are a bit unusual. Half of this section is a repetition – most likely for emphasis, but there are some differences between the matching pairs of statements.

This morning, I will follow with the commentators who see the three levels of spiritual maturity in the three groups John addresses.

Read vs. 13-14

The children are the immature in Christ.

In vs. 12a – John is addressing all believers – he viewed the readers of his letter as children of God – and many of them were his spiritual children by faith.

Vs. 13b – John uses a different term for "children" – *padia* – this Gr. word means infant – baby – helpless one – a child who needed to be trained and taught. This is indeed a change from John's other mention of "children" in 12a.

Here, in vs. 13b, John is addressing the immature believer – whose primary focus and understanding is in God's forgiveness of their sins – and their focus is on

God Himself. They are amazed at God's forgiveness and love for them.

We see a wonderful parallel here in the physical realm. A baby's first awareness is to their parents – usually “mama” first, but “dada” is close behind! They are enamored with the new relationship that is growing and developing between baby and parent.

Illus. – Talk about how Brian and Jessica used to stare at my face, grab my ears, nose, lips, etc.

What do new Christians know? They know God. They are excited about their new understanding and relationship with God. This is the basic knowledge of faith.

Romans 8:15 (see also Gal. 4:6)

“...you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

This is the person that is soaring with their affections toward God, not their knowledge of His Word or the fullness of His truth.

By the way – there is nothing wrong with this. When a person first comes to faith in Christ, this description is a picture of normality. However, if this is describing a person who has been a believer for a length of time, then this would be indicative of a problem. Numerous passages in Scripture command us to move beyond infantile things and to grab hold of maturity.

1 Peter 2:2-3

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

The “children” are driven by their affections, not by doctrine or the truth of God’s Word.

One of the dangers for new believers – for those who are immature – for spiritual babies – is that they need protection.

Physically, babies need the watchful eye of their parents to make sure they don’t harm themselves. Left unprotected, they would roll off of the changing table, crawl over the edge of the stairs, stick their fingers in the electrical outlet, or put a razor blade into their mouth. It is the nature of a child to be curious and to be led astray – to be easily deceived.

They don’t know any better – their learning curve is steep – and they need to be protected from the dangers in the world.

This trait of little children is what makes them so fun to be around – their unconditional love for each person. In like fashion, the spiritual baby needs to be protected by those in the church who are more mature. They need to be protected from false teachers and from cults who prey on the immature Christian...which is where the next group comes in...

The young men are those *fighting* for Christ.

The young men have transitioned from having this great affection for God, to having knowledge of God’s Word. Their affection for God has morphed into affection for His Word.

John says that the young men are strong – and the reason is because they have the Word of God in their mind. They have knowledge of God and His Word.

They have been able to defeat the evil one (Satan) because of their knowledge of God's Word.

Matthew 4:4

Jesus answered, "It is written: `Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Given the false teaching that had invaded the churches, this would be the group that would stand up for the truth – the group that would resist and correct the false teaching.

Since the bible tells us that Satan disguises himself as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), we know that false teaching and false religion is one of the ways Satan goes about destroying Christians.

The babe in Christ is easily deceived by false religion – and false religion is one of the primary ways Satan deceives people and keeps them from Christ. But the young men will fight against Satan's false teaching and stand up for the truth of God's Word.

Psalm 106:36-37

"They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons."

1 Cor. 10:20

"No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God..."

But the young man – who has God's Word in Him – is able to discern what truth is – and what is a lie. They are ready to debate anyone they can – they are ready to argue with the Mormon or JW about the falsities in they teach.

Danger: The young man can neglect their relationship with God – and focus solely on knowing truth. They can be so focused on doctrine and truth that they neglect God's grace for themselves and for others. They can tell you all about God's grace, but they are in

danger of never giving grace to others. Jesus was the perfect balance between grace and truth – and the young man who fights for Christ can be too heavy on the truth side and minimize grace.

The third group John refers to is the fathers – and...

The fathers have a *full* and *deep* relationship with God.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

In a sense, they have come full circle – back to the Father, but they now have a fuller and deeper knowledge of God.

The fathers not only know the doctrine, but they have a deep understanding of the God behind the doctrine.

They have a deep understanding of the heart of God as well as His truth.

The father understands and lives out the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 1. *What is the chief end of man?*

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Application

1. Be encouraged that no matter where you are on the continuum (child, young man, father), that you are completely forgiven and loved by God.
2. Where are you on the continuum? Don't stay there! Push on to maturity in Christ!
3. Salvation – ABC's – Admit your sins, Believe in Jesus, Choose to follow Christ.