

GROWING UP IN CHRIST – Part 2
1 Corinthians 2:12-3:3

Last week I talked about how it is a normal and natural expectation that we would grow physically. God has also designed us to grow spiritually. God takes us, as dead in our sins, and gives us a new birth by His Spirit, to where we are born anew in His kingdom. But we don't start out as full-grown Christians, we start out as a Child of God, grow into a Youth in Christ and ultimately mature into an Adult in Christ. Last week I said I would expand on this a little.

Christian growth does not come easy. Galatians 5:19-23 describes an internal tug of war we experience as we grow between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Works are something we produce on our own. Galatians.5:19-21, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Fruit is something that we can't produce on our own, but must be produced in us. Fruit is the result of the growing influence of the Holy Spirit on our lives Galatians.5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." One will be stronger than the other, depending where we are in our Christian growth.

- One who is not in Christ is described in the Pre-Christian life. The Pre-Christian life is like a seed that hasn't germinated or an unfertilized egg. It has the potential for life, but can rot or remain dormant and never grow until the right moment or conditions. So the life of a person not in Christ is self-centered, as long as self is served in some way, and a self-centered life primarily produces the works of the flesh.

The first stage of real growth is when the seed is fertilized, a person is born of the Spirit into the kingdom of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. This is the first stage of growth, but even though Christ is in their life, self is still strongly in control.

Now I want to emphasize this stage of growth, because this is where too many Christians get stuck. Starting out a baby is alright – but staying one is downright ridiculous; Paul had this problem with the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 he says, "¹Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?" Some churches, even today, are just big nurseries where the pastor feels like he or she is running from crying baby to crying baby, sticking a bottle in their mouths just to pacify them. Any parent knows how exhausting that can be with one or two infants, but imagine what it's like when there is a whole church full of them?

- When do we grow out of this? Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "The true Christian never has to give up anything (of course I am not speaking of sins), but there are a lot of things that will give him up. They will go one by one. There will be no grief. It will be the way childish occupations are abandoned. I never had to give up playing with tops and marbles. I never had to come to the place where I said, "Oh I am a big boy now, and big boys shouldn't play marbles. So I will make a great effort to give up playing marbles." It did not happen that way. One day I was playing marbles with a group of small boys and some older boys came by. They looked at me and said, "Hey, kid, can you field a ball?" "Sure I can," I replied with more vigor than accuracy. "Well," they said, "we are short a fielder. Get out there and see what you can do." I went out and was ready to play my head off to keep up with the older fellows. When it was my turn to bat I was ready to swing till I burst, and to run till I dropped, and do all that I could to keep up with the bigger company I was in. And when the game was over and we older boys, as I then classed myself, walked down the street past the little fellows who were playing marbles, I did not go back to marbles. I had graduated. I did not give up marbles, marbles gave me up."

The next major stage of growth is the Youth in Christ. When we get to this stage is difficult to say – we grow into it. Jesus is becoming more central in their life and Self is having less of a say – but be careful not to lower your guard – that's where the Youth in Christ has a problem – they begin to think they are invincible – that's when the Devil sticks them. The Works of the flesh begin to die, and the Fruit of the Spirit grows stronger

A good example of this is found in an incident described by Ethel Barrett in her book *It Only Hurts When I Laugh*. She said that when D.L. Moody became a Christian, he developed such a hunger for God's Word, spent so much time reading it, and was so quick to obey it that he became a "menace" to some believers. His rapid spiritual growth was an embarrassment to certain people who, though they had been saved for years, never grew up in Christ. Week after week in the church Moody attended, he would share a new experience he had with the Lord. Finally, some of the older saints who just couldn't stand feeling humiliated by his exemplary life, went to Moody's uncle and urged him to quiet down his nephew.

Ethel Barrett drew this conclusion about Moody: "His robust spiritual health and bounding energy disturbed their napping; he was just too much. So, while they were sucking their thumbs, he was growing until he left them far behind; he grew more in a few years than they did in thirty.

And finally the Adult in Christ. Ultimately the adult in Christ grows to live a life that is Christ-centered. The Fruit of the Spirit is dominant. We know the mind of Christ, and we live a Christ-like life. This is our goal.

Now the only problem with looking at the end product of Christian growth is that it can be overwhelming and seem like an impossible goal. Some have shown

Christian growth to be like climbing a ladder. Different people are just at different places in growth. But the problem is that some people get proud and think they are higher up than they are, and others want to knock them down to size. Neither is right.

Growth is more holistic, like a tree grows – from the smallest to the largest- it is complete – roots, trunk, branches. Some are just older than others.

Some people think they can grow from an acorn into an oak overnight, but we know that's just not the way it works. The acorn first lands on the ground, and water and soil make it germinate and grow (complete but small at first) until it become a mighty oak. And just in case you get discouraged, looking at how much you have to grow, I'm reminded of a poem that ends, "Remember that the mighty oak was once a nut like you!" - Douglas Rumford said "Full-grown oaks are not produced in three years; neither are servants of God."

- The tree analogy helps when we see how it grows. Do you know how to tell the age of a tree? You can look at a cross section of the trunk and see the rings, which represent the seasons of its growth. As a Christian there will be seasons of growth in your life – you are learning and growing rapidly – but there will also be some dry times in your spiritual life, trials, problems, difficulties – those are the hard and narrow ring seasons of your life – but remember, it's those seasons that will make you strong.

Everybody starts the same, as a seed. Is the seed dead or alive? Only when the right conditions are present and God's Spirit fills you, will the seed planted in you come alive and grow. Jesus said in John 12:24, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

A Christian life well lived will produce fruit. And remember fruit contains seeds that will produce other Christians, due to the influence of your life

Where are you in your spiritual life? God accepts you where you are, but He loves you too much to leave you there. Time does not make you grow – if you think that is true, you will be deceived. We are dealing with eternal issues. Only God can help you to grow spiritually. Do you want to grow up? Are you ready for your next stage of growth? If you will let Him, God will do something wonderful in you – His Spirit will produce fruit in your life that will bring you fulfillment and lead others to Jesus Christ