

Growing Up in Christ

Ephesians 4:15-16 - *Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

This thirteen week study is designed to promote a mindset that seeks and achieves spiritual maturity.

CLASS	DATE	TEACHER
1. Spiritual Maturity is and is not	January 5	Brian H.
2. Examples of Growth	January 12	Brian H.
3. Attitude	January 19	Brian H.
4. Identifying Spiritual Priorities	January 26	Brian H.
5. The Fruit of the Spirit	February 2	Anthony Ward
6. Growing in knowledge	February 9	Michael H.
7. The Inner Man	February 16	Steven J.
8. Growing Zeal	February 23	Ryan S.
9. Serving others	March 2	
10. Serving in the church	March 9	Anthony W.
11. Being evangelical	March 16	Steven J.
12. Unstained by the World	March 23	Ryan S.
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Class 1: Defining Spiritual Maturity

January 5

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2-3

I. What is Spiritual Maturity: maturity is often described in terms of growing up. In the human body we are born infants, progress as toddlers and children, through adolescence into adulthood. We are constantly growing and changing until the moment of our death. Spiritual maturity is not different; it is a change from being a babe in Christ (1 Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5:13) to growing up into the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

QUESTIONS

1. How would we define Spiritual Maturity based on 2 Corinthians 14:20?
2. What was Paul telling the Corinthians was the evidence of their spiritual immaturity in 1 Corinthians 2-3?
3. What was the evidence of spiritual maturity in Hebrews 5:12?
4. How are the fruit of the Spirit a sign of maturity (Galatians 5:22-23)?

II. What is NOT Spiritual Maturity: Have you ever seen a large baby? A tall adolescent? We would not likely say that they are mature and grown merely by their size. So too there are false indicators of spiritual maturity. The reason we need to consider this is that Scriptures warn us not to esteem ourselves mature by false standards. The trick in understanding this is that sometimes there are measurements that are PART of spiritual maturity, but not of themselves complete indications.

QUESTIONS

1. How is the amount of time we have been a Christian NOT a total measurement of maturity (Hebrews 5:12)?
2. How is the amount of time we have been a Christian part of our maturity (1 Timothy 3:6)
3. How are our good works NOT a total measurement of maturity (Matthew 7:22)?
4. How are our good works part of a measurement of maturity (James 3:13)?
5. How is knowledge NOT a total measurement of maturity (1 Corinthians 8:1)?
6. How is knowledge part of a measurement of maturity (2 Peter 3:18)?
5. What are some other false or incomplete measurements of maturity?

Class 2: Examples of Growth

January 12

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1, Philippians 1

I. The Thessalonians: Paul was only briefly with the Thessalonians (Acts 17:1-9), but he was amazed at their spiritual growth in his absence. The Thessalonians became a group of Christians who Paul could show all of the churches as an example. Particularly, when they were persecuted, they overcame. This is a key part of spiritual maturity; when faced with adversity, the spiritually mature overcome.

QUESTIONS

1. What was some of the tribulation and persecution the Thessalonians saw?
2. What persecution and tribulation do we face today?
3. What is the connection of spiritual maturity and overcoming difficulty?
4. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, how does the maturity of the Thessalonians affect those around them?
5. How does the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11 also demonstrate maturity?

II. The Philippians: Philippi had a humble origin as a congregation (Acts 16). Lydia and a Philippian jailer were members of this church of whom we are aware. But when a need arose for the Christians in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:1-6, 9:1-5 tells us that these same people rose up to offer beyond their means. Spiritual maturity is seen in generosity, service and love for others.

QUESTIONS

1. What is our individual obligation regarding the collection?
2. How is understanding what this contribution is used for a matter of maturity?
3. What does it mean when it describes the Philippians going beyond their ability?
3. How does sharing with others demonstrate our trust in God?
4. What are the benefits of generosity?

Reading: Philippians 2

I. The Right Attitudes: God told Cain that he needed to change his attitude (countenance) or he would ultimately fall into sin (Genesis 4:6-7). Often our success or failure in spiritual growth is most affected by our attitude. What is the right attitude towards spiritual growth? First of all the right attitude is believing it is possible. Second, we need to have an attitude that it is important. Finally, we need to have a genuine desire to grow.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Philippians 4:13 address the attitude of believing growth is possible?
2. How does the parable in Matthew 25:14-29 relate to spiritual growth?
3. Is desire for growth natural, or is it something we need to create (1 Peter 2:2)?
4. Why is the belief that we are able to grow (that it is possible) important?
5. How is Isaiah's attitude in Isaiah 6:8 a model of our attitude?
6. What other servants in the Bible had attitudes we should model?

II. The Wrong Attitudes: Just as the correct attitude brings success, the wrong attitude brings failure. Consider Moses and his denial of the ability to lead Israel, or the prophets who believed themselves incapable of serving God. An attitude of inability denies the ability of God to equip us to serve. Just as dangerous is an attitude of apathy towards spiritual growth. Finally, when we have hostile attitudes towards the world or towards our fellow servants we are limiting ourselves in regards to spiritual growth.

QUESTIONS

1. What happens when someone declares "I can't do (_____)"?
1. What is a common bad attitude towards spiritual growth?
2. What is a common bad attitude regarding the world?
3. What is a common bad attitude regarding our brethren?
4. How do we overcome these bad attitudes?

Class 4: Identifying Spiritual Priorities

January 26

Reading: 2 Peter 1, 1 Corinthians 12

I. Spiritual Goals: In 2nd Peter 1 Peter stated that our spiritual success was based on a series of attributes we pursued and increased. “Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” We see here that there is almost a process of spiritual growth that requires that we (1) identify our location in life and (2) determine what our next focus ought to be. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul approaches it differently. He describes each of us having a “place” in the body that requires us to understand our ability and calling to serve. Spiritual goals require us to see what we are capable of doing now and what we can pursue to our growth.

QUESTIONS

1. How does one add to faith virtue? To virtue knowledge? Etc.?
2. Is the order of the addition of effort in 2 Peter 1 important?
3. Why is love at the end of Peter’s list of spiritual steps rather than the beginning?
4. How can we determine what our spiritual abilities are now?
5. How does our place in life define spiritual ability and growth?

II. Confused Priorities: Jesus told the Pharisees that they had their priorities backwards when He said “*you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith*” (Matthew 23:23). Not all priorities are the same, and often we neglect things that are more important or pertinent to our spiritual condition. We are commanded to work, to submit to the government, to submit in marriage, to focus on our children, to take care of our parents. But when these obligations overshadow or negate another, we are actually in error. Our spiritual priorities matter. It is easy to see when sinful matters upset spiritual goals, but sometimes it is spiritual matters that are out of order, and such can still cause us to stumble.

QUESTIONS

1. How might you rank your spiritual priorities?
2. When might someone regard work too highly?
3. When might someone regard government submission too highly?
4. When might someone regard the assembly too highly?

Reading: Galatians 5:18-26

I. Fruit of the Spirit: Perhaps the most obvious fruit that a Christian is to bear if they are growing in grace and knowledge is the fruit of the spirit that are listed in Galatians 5. In that passage Paul contrasts those things which are found in the spiritually immature (the works of the flesh), and points out that anyone who practices these things is cut off from God.

QUESTIONS

1. What is love in the New Testament? How is it different from what the world calls love?
2. What is the difference between joy and happiness?
3. What is the peace that surpasses understanding in Philippians 4:6-7? How do we obtain this peace?
4. How do we learn patience and longsuffering?
5. What is gentleness/kindness described as in James 3:17-18?
6. How would you define goodness? How is it obtained?
7. How can we tell when we or others possess self-control? According to 2 Peter 1:5-6, what must exist before we can exercise self-control?
8. When we are lacking the fruit of the spirit, what should we do?

II. Works of the Flesh: Paul lists works of the flesh in a list similar to 1 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5. But consider that there are also mental aspects of these things that may not be seen. Envy, hatred, bitterness, jealousy, lewdness and selfishness are all matters within the heart and mind that (1) are in direct conflict with the fruit of the spirit and (2) may cause us to lose our inheritance.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we tell if we have in our hearts the works of the flesh?
2. According to Matthew 6:23, how do people who struggle with works of the flesh see the world and others?

Reading: 2 Peter 1, 2 Timothy 2

I. Everyone Needs to Grow in Knowledge: Timothy was a man upon whom miraculous gifts were passed (2 Timothy 1:6). He was also an eyewitness and participant in the ministry of Paul. Yet even after having served God many years, Paul's final admonition to him was to be diligent in the handling of Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15); in other words, even men supernaturally blessed need to study the Scriptures.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the study of the Scriptures avoid "being ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15)?
2. What would you describe as the basic principles of Bible Study?
3. What are the differences in privately studying and studying with someone?
4. How do you personally satisfy the need to grow in knowledge?

II. What Do You Need To Know: While all Scriptures inspired and profitable, we recognize that some things are weightier than others, and some things ought to be studied more than others. The New Testament has more relevance and practical application to us than the Old; the matters pertaining to living in Christ are of greater practical application than the prophecies of Scripture. At the same time, we cannot neglect these things either. Growing in knowledge means determining what we need to know to grow. Not studying what we need can be a failure, as we are told that some can study and not grow (2 Timothy 3:7).

QUESTIONS

1. What might be an example of a study more important than another subject?
2. Why are some "*always learning but never coming to a knowledge of truth*"?
3. What are some reasons or method of studying that are a failure?
4. What would you say to someone who says Christians should not study the OT?
5. What would you study with someone who was a new convert?

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4, Romans 7

I. The Dualism of Existence: Scriptures make the case that we live a dual existence: an outward person and an inward person. The outward person is dying every day due to the deprivations of age and experience. There is nothing to do to stop this. But we have complete control over the inward man, the person that we are by our behavior constantly building. It is this person that Scriptures seek for us to be focused on and in support of by our spiritual growth.

QUESTIONS

1. What strengthens the inner man (Eph. 3:16)?
2. If one is not a Christian, what is their inner man like?
3. What is meant by 1 Peter 3:4 and the hidden person?
4. Why is the inner person often described as “hidden”? Why hide it?
5. How can we discern when someone is more focused on the outer man?

II. The Struggle of Dualism: Accepting the dualism of existence means accepting the inner conflict of trying to be a Christian. Paul said that while his inward man delighted in God, the outer man wanted other things. This struggle is often the reason we have emotional turmoil and internal conflict. James 4:1-2 speaks to this within the body of Christ, and this parallels the body of a Christian. The reason so many Christians struggle is that the outer man has not yet submitted to the control of the inward man.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul mean that the outward man seeks another law (Rom. 7:23)?
2. What does Paul mean to say “*nothing good dwells in the flesh*” (Rom. 7:18)?
3. How can you tell who (the outward man or the inward man) is in control?
4. Per James 4:1-2, what does an inward battle look like/feel like?
5. How can I take control of my outward person? What does this accomplish?

Reading: Numbers 25:7-13; Titus 2:14; Revelation 3:19

I. Understanding Zeal: What is zeal? We might describe it as the emotional energy that can be placed into behavior that charges our actions and thoughts. Zeal could be described too as the missing quality when people know what they should do, but are not doing it. When someone acts with zeal, we might call them a zealot. There are a number of excellent Bible examples of zeal: when Phinehas stood up against sin in Numbers 25; when Jesus cleansed the temple in John 2; when Elijah defeated the false prophets in 1 Kings 18. We are also given examples of the dangers of zeal without knowledge (Romans 10:2, Acts 22:3, Galatians 4:17, Philippians 3:6).

QUESTIONS

1. What do we see in the zeal of Phinehas? In other words, where did his emotional energy come from in Numbers 25?
2. What was the reason for Jesus' zeal in John 2 at the temple?
3. Why is it that to many people "zealot" has a negative connotation? Why do zealous people make others uncomfortable?
4. How did many Israelites in Paul's time have zeal without knowledge?
5. What are examples today of people with zeal apart from knowledge?

II. Growing Zeal: If the knowledge of God were a car engine, then zeal is the gasoline. It is the combustible energy necessary to make it run. Since we are commanded to have zeal, then it is something that we have the ability to manifest and grow. We have seen already that zeal must come from an understanding of God's will. Zeal is willing emotional energy into our knowledge of God's desire. We do this for example when we come together for the Lord's Supper; we encourage with words a zeal for this act, reminding ourselves of the great love and great sacrifice of Jesus with particular words at the table. We need to grow an emotional energy that infuses every act of obedience.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of ways we exhibit zeal in service to God?
2. If we know what we must do, how do we grow zeal to do it?
3. What happens to Christians who do not grow their zeal? What does that look like?
4. What are some of the benefits to being zealous?
5. When others have zeal, what does that do to or for us?

Class 9: Serving Others

March 2

Reading: Isaiah 53, John 13:1-17, Philippians 2

I. Importance of Serving: The concept of being a servant cannot be overstated in its importance to being a Christian. To be a Christian is to put on Christ; Jesus Christ is at His core a Servant. Jesus served the Father, and Jesus served us. His lesson of this in John 13 was that none of us can neglect serving each other. There Jesus made it clear: to be His follower means that we are servants to all, especially our brethren. Without the heart of a servant, one cannot be pleasing to God.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Isaiah 53, what kind of servant was Jesus?
2. How did Christ view serving us?
3. How did the Apostles react when Jesus washed their feet in John 13? Why?
4. Why is it that someone cannot be a Christian if they are unwilling to serve?
5. What is the heart of a servant? Or, what is the attitude of one who serves?
6. What are some attitudes that are hostile to being a servant?

II. Growing Service: If we are to be servants, it is something we need to exert diligent effort to accomplish. It is not enough to be a servant; we need to be ever increasing our service to God and to one another. Growin our service is both in improving our attitude as well as creating opportunities to serve. Paul said in Philippians 2 that we need to put on the mind of Christ, by not seeing ourselves as above serving anyone. Then we need to create opportunities to serve.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to put on the mind of Christ?
2. How can we make ourselves feel better about serving others?
3. What are some ways to find opportunities to serve other Christians?
4. What are some ways to find opportunities to serve in the church?
5. What are some ways to find opportunities to serve non-believers?

Reading: 1 Timothy 3, 1 Corinthians 12

I. Works within the church: throughout the New Testament we see that the design of the local church was to have men and women of spiritual maturity who served in particular positions to which they are called. Elders, deacons, teachers and evangelists are mentioned often as being part of this structure (Ephesians 4:11, Titus 1:5, Philippians 1:1). Not everyone is called to every work, but we are all able to do something (1 Corinthians 12:12-23). Members of the church need to prepare themselves for these works by growing themselves in spiritual maturity.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the terms for an elder in the Bible?
2. How are people called to be elders, deacons, preachers or teachers?
3. Why are the qualifications for these works limited to only certain people? Is this something God has done before (i.e. Old Testament)?
4. How does someone prepare themselves to be an elder, deacon, evangelist, or the wife of an elder, deacon evangelist?

II. Unspecific Works of the Church: There is an interesting point to consider about the works of elder, deacon, evangelist or teacher. This is that these terms are all used in an unspecific way regarding the general efforts of members. In other words, Paul describes in Titus 1 the office of the elder; then in chapter 2 he describes the efforts of older men and women in general, using the same word as chapter 1 but a different application. "Deacon" means servant, and it is used to describe members of the church in general, as is the word "minister", another name for an evangelist. Even if we are not called to the specific offices in the church, we may still mature into participating in the generic works of the same nature.

QUESTIONS

1. What is expected of older men and women per Titus 2:1-5?
2. How was Phoebe a servant in Romans 16:1?
3. How (and where) does Jesus fit into every office in a non-specific way?

Reading: Ezekiel 33, Matthew 6:19-34

I. The Watchman: God told Ezekiel that he was a watchman who needed to warn others of the judgment of God. We often point to this concept as a fundamental reason why we need to be people who tell others of the Way of Christ. Paul said that the work of preaching is about warning people in Colossians 1:28. We are most effective in that warning when we are living lives that are lights to the world, as Jesus mentioned in Matthew 6:19-34. Consider that Noah, by living according to the way of God, was a preacher of righteousness in his conduct (2 Peter 2:5).

QUESTIONS

1. What was the job of a watchman in the time of Ezekiel?
2. What is the purpose and intent of the spiritual watchman today?
3. How can a person lose sight of the purpose of warning others?
4. How does living as a light to the world convict others of sin?

II. Growing Ourselves in Evangelism: Evangelism literally means “good news”, and those who are in Christ are charged to share with others the good news (Gospel) of Jesus Christ. We must first train our attitude in order to grow ourselves in this work. We need to create a desire to speak on the things of the Gospel. We need to have a compassion and love for the lost (Mark 6:34). Paul’s love for his fellow Israelites who were lost was such that he would have traded places with them if he could (Romans 9:1-3). We also need to grow ourselves by preparing an answer to the questions we may be asked. Finally, we need to be courageous and put away timidity in order to seek the lost (2 Timothy 1:7).

QUESTIONS

1. How can we create a desire to share the Gospel?
2. What attitudes do we need to overcome to be of the right mind in this?
3. What are some of the common questions or defenses those who are lost present to us that we can prepared an answer for ahead of time?

Reading: James 1:27, James 3:13-4:4, 1 Timothy 6:14, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

I. Pure Religion: James boils our faith down into two ideas: serving those in need and being “unstained by the world”. Sin and worldliness is often described as being a stain on our garments. One might consider that many stains cannot be easily removed; some cannot be removed at all. Sometimes worldliness stains us, and it is not easily washed out. We need to consider that there are many stains that the world can cause; in James 3:13 through chapter 4 James related things that are stains of the world, such as envy and strife. He says in chapter 4 that the cause of this is friendship with the world.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the spiritual garment that a Christian wear?
2. How is worldliness like a stain?
3. What are some of the stains of worldliness?
4. What is friendship with the world, and how does it stain us with worldliness?
- 5.

II. Worldly Stains Versus Spiritual Growth: Spiritual growth might be compared with physical fitness (1 Timothy 4:8, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). In that comparison, worldliness is the “junk food” that slows or prevents us from getting in shape, even when we are exerting effort to become fit. People who are stained with worldliness will find spiritual growth difficult if not impossible. If our thinking is plagued with envy, covetousness, anger, bitterness, pride, or other worldly mindsets, even when we confess these sins and obtain forgiveness we may still be hindered in growing because of the impact of these things. Spiritual grow requires a total removal of the worldly junk food that inhibits us (Hebrews 12:1).

QUESTIONS

1. How is spiritual growth comparable to physical fitness?
2. How is worldliness comparable to eating “junk food”?
3. How do people who exercise AND eat junk food feel?
4. Is anger a sin? What does James 1:20 say?
5. How does pride prevent spiritual growth?
6. How does envy prevent spiritual growth?
7. How can we rid our lives of the weights that inhibit us?

Class 13: The World Chokes Out Maturity

March 30

Reading: Mark 4:14-20, 1 Timothy 6:9-17, John 17:12-16

I. Sown Among the Thorns: The parable of the soils tells us that of the three types of people who choose to become Christians, two of them will fail. The second person, the seed among thorns, describes someone who permits the word of God to grow among the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. This is a good analogy for us to consider, a person who may desire to succeed but allows the world to prevent success.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the cares of the world?
2. How are riches deceitful? How is the love of riches the root of all kinds of evil?
3. What are some of the other things that we desire that prevent growth?
4. What are the results of the choking of the Word?

II. Spiritual Gardening: If we follow the parable's teaching, Jesus is telling us that we need to prepare and work the soil that is our heart. We need to remove the rocks and pull the weeds in order to bear the fruits of maturity. Worldliness is completely under our control. We can permit it to live within us or we can remove it. The fruit of the Word is dependent on our removal of worldliness from our lives.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the fruits of worldliness in our lives?
2. How do we identify worldliness in our lives?
3. How can we be in the world and not be worldly?
4. Is everything that is worldly sinful?
5. How might we apply a passage such as Romans 13:14 in combating worldliness?