

I Hope He Grows Up

(1 John 2:12-14)

10/19/16; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The story has been told of a 3rd grade teacher who had a class of kids that just couldn't get along..

Every day there were insults and even fights..

So, the teacher decided to give one homework assignment over the weekend...

She copied the class roll and gave it to each of the students and their job was to take that roll home over the weekend and beside each person's name write down one thing that they liked about that person...

Failure to complete the assignment would lead to punishment as well as failure to find something nice to say about everyone on the roll...

When the students returned on Monday, the teacher collected the papers, went home and put each student's name on the top and then listed all the good things that others said about them below their name.

Though she couldn't be sure, the assignment seemed to help the insults , bullying and fighting for the

year and the class survived and moved on to 4th grade.

10 years later, the class gathered for the first time after graduation to mourn the loss of one of their classmates in Vietnam...

After the funeral, the class sat down with the family and many of their former teachers...

At the reunion, the parents of the boy who was killed pulled out an old piece of paper that was found on their son in Vietnam.

In his wallet, the parents found the list of nice things that his classmates had written about him in 3rd grade...

At the top of the page, their son had scribbled...

Be an encourager to others..

As the paper was unfolded, the teacher's eyes were filled with tears to see how that seemingly little assignment had made such an impact...

However, what was more incredible was the fact that 3 other classmates had also saved the same piece of paper and one girl even had it in her pocketbook that very day...

Needless to say, the teacher was overjoyed, and made the assignment a regular part of her class for the rest of her teaching years..

Encouragement is a good thing, and it often comes at the most needed times..

IF you have been with us from the start of 1 John, we are only 1 1/2 chapters into the book, but we need encouragement...

John is very plain spoken fellow and he has put us and his readers to a test of salvation...

What do they believe about Jesus?

What do they believe about sin?

How well do they show their love for God in their obedience?

And how well do they show their love for one another by their actions?

But when we get to verses 12-14 of 1 John 2, we get encouraged and reminded of something very important about the book of 1 John, this was a book not meant to make true believers doubt their salvation..

Instead, it was a book to true believers to help them identify false converts...

You see the readers of 1 John were under assault from false teachers, and they needed help separating true teachers from false teachers...

And John is giving them tests of salvation to not only take themselves but also to put others through as well...

What a person believes about Jesus and about sin identifies them as a true or false believer but also as a true or false teacher...

How a person loves God and their neighbor is an indication of whether a claim of salvation is true or false...

Though anyone who claims to know Christ should put themselves through the tests of 1 John, the point is not to reveal that no one is saved...

It is simply to help true believers identify false believers in the world..

In fact, John assumes that his readers are saved...

The summary verse of the entire letter in chapter 5 tells us this...

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

The point of the book is not to create doubt but certainty in the minds of the truly saved...

And to help them identify the impostors who were coming to them teaching all sorts of lies...

In many ways, 1 John is a book of encouragement to its readers and we are going to see some of that tonight in verses 12-14 of 1 John 2...

I have enticed this section...

“Same Salvation, Different People”

Because this is a section that addresses the concept of spiritual growth and how it relates to testing the salvation of someone who claims to be saved...

There is a common misconception in churches that does great harm to the body of Christ, and it is this...

If you don't know what I know, you can't be saved in the same way that I am saved...

In other words, God only saves those who reach a certain level of spiritual maturity...

And that causes all sorts of problems in the church, as people look down on others and expect too much too soon from others...

Now, let me be clear here...

Spiritual growth does not save anyone, but the saved always grow spiritually...

However sometimes, we raise the salvation too high for others when we could have never jumped it ourselves..

Let's look at verses 12-14 in order to get a better understanding of spiritual growth in the Christian and see how it relates to life in the church and the issue of true salvation...

Let's read these verses...

1 John 2:12-14...

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been

from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

What I want to do is take these verses and draw 3 Principles of Spiritual Growth that will encourage us to grow but give us a balanced perspective of other's spiritual growth as well...

Let's start with Principle #1..

I. Spiritual Growth Must Be Kept in Perspective (12)

As we come to verse 12, we must get the proper picture of what John is doing here...

We see words like fathers, young men, and children, but the thought is not that John is just addressing male members of the church in a very literal sense...

Instead, John is using a word picture to describe the 3 stages of spiritual growth in Christians....

Every Christian finds himself in one of these general stages of the Christian walk...

Children represent those that are just saved....

They have just been reborn through to a new life in Christ....

They are babes in Christ...

They are like children in every sense of the word...

Next, we see young men...

These are Christians who have grown from babies into more mature Christians...

And then, there are fathers who are the most mature Christians of all...

But before, he gets into the different levels of spiritual growth, John makes a blanket statement in verse 12 to all Christians...

Though he says, “little children” in verse 12 and “children” in verse 13, he chooses two different Greek words each time...

The word in verse 13 is a word that means someone under authority of their parents...

In verse 12, the term little children is used in a general sense...

As in the children of God...

So, John simply begins this section by talking to all Christians in general, and he simply writes...

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name sake...

In other words, John is reaffirming that this letter is to all believers, so he begins this section by simply encouraging all believers of the truth that their sins have been forgiven..

In that truth, we find an important principle of the idea of spiritual growth...

Spiritual growth does not add anything to the truth of what happens at salvation...

When a person truly repents and believes in Christ, all sins are forgiven immediately..

There is no gradual forgiveness of sins that comes as you grow in the Lord...

All sins have been forgiven at the time of repentance and belief....

So spiritual growth does not enhance your standing before God...

When God declared you not guilty, you were not guilty forever regardless of how little or great your matured in your walk..

Along those lines, spiritual growth does not increase God's love of you either...

God loves you regardless of how much or little you grow spiritually....

We must never fall into the trap of believing that God's forgiveness and God's love increases or de-

creases depending upon how much we mature in our faith...

Though God desires us to grow, we must remember that his love and forgiveness of us is set forever at the moment of salvation...

So, the first principle of spiritual growth is to keep it in perspective...

In other words, don't ride the roller coaster of God loves me, He loves not, God loves me, He loves me not when it comes to your spiritual growth...

God loves perfectly and has forgiven you completely if you have been truly saved...

You must not put too much emphasis on spiritual or you will become a person who sees good works as the key to being right with God...

Now, with that proper perspective in mind, let us now look at spiritual growth principle #2...

II. Spiritual Growth Must Be Seen in the Church (13-14)

One thing that is clear from these verses is this...

Not every true Christian is in the same stage of maturity in their walk with the Lord...

And there is nothing wrong with that...

In fact, a healthy church should have people in all the stages of growth...

There should be fathers there made up of men and women who are spiritually mature and leading and serving the church....

There should be young men there represented by men and women who are beginning to grow in their walk with the Lord as the church takes disciple seriously..

And every healthy church needs children in it represented by those who are coming to the gospel as the church preaches and lives the gospel in the community....

Healthy churches have fathers, young men, and children in them that represent all the stages of spiritual growth...

Now, a note needs to be made here...

Spiritual maturity has nothing to do with time...

There may be some older people in a congregation who are children in their walk with the Lord..

Either they were saved later in life or they have not grown in their walk with the Lord at all since being saved earlier in life...

You can also have some younger ages people be fathers in the church...

And you can young men of all ages as well..

In other words, just because someone is old in the worlds eyes doesn't make them spiritually mature, and just because someone is young doesn't make them a child in the spiritual maturity..

The only way to see maturity is to judge the fruit of their lives....

To judge the actions and words of their lives...

So, what do these stages of spiritual growth look like?

Let's start with the children in verse 13....

Children simply are those who “know the Father.”

Children are those new Christians who know very little about the Bible or about the Christian life, however they know enough to know that they have repented of their sins and trusted Christ...

And now they only know that they are right with the Lord...

They know God, and they simply enjoy their new guilt-free relationship with him...

Like a little child, they know very little about their parents other than they are always there when they need them...

This is the state of folks who are true new believers in Christ...

They simply love the Lord and enjoy the love that He gives to them...

Now, that sounds great and it is great for the child, but there will be a progression out of childhood toward being a young man...

Many of us would say that we would love to stay a kid forever, but that isn't the case, for we enjoy the blessings of growing up and there are blessing for maturing in the Lord as well...

So let's move from the lowest level of spiritual maturity to the next level, which is that of a young man...

In verse 13, John gives us a description of the young man...

Not only does he know the Father as a child, but he has overcome the evil one...

So what does this mean and how does this happen?

First, let's define what it means to overcome the evil one which simply is a statement of what has happened at salvation..

When the believer repents and believes in Christ, he moves to a place of victory over Satan and his demons...

Though temptation still comes, victory has been guaranteed to the believer...

Horatio Stafford says it best in the second verse of It Is Well With My Soul...

***Though Satan should buffet, though trials should
come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,***

***And hath shed His own blood for my soul
It is well (it is well)
With my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul***

In other words, one of the great benefits of maturing spiritually from a child to a young man is the assurance of victory..

New believers usually struggle with the assurance of their salvation...

Young men reach a point where they are assured of their salvation and their victory over Satan...

Normally, assurance of salvation is not a constant struggle for the man or woman who has grown in their faith from a new believer to a more mature one..

Now, how does this growth take place?

Very simple....Look at the middle of verse 14..

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Consistent Bible reading, Bible study and Bible living leads to assurance of victory over the evil one...

Spiritually speaking, children grow to young men by prolonged exposure to the word of God and abiding in it and by it...

We tell our kids to eat their vegetables so that they will grown big and strong..

We should tell baby Christians to eat their Bibles so they grow big and strong as well...

There is no substitute for reading, studying, and obeying the word of God to help your mature in your faith...

Unfortunately, we live in a day and age where people overlook this most valuable practice in the Christian life...

Some see Bible reading and study as old fashioned and outdated...

Some churches try to mature their people by providing lower lights and louder music to make people think they are maturing in the Lord...

You grow most when you are alone with the word of God reading it, hearing it, and obeying it...

And young men become young men because they abide in God's Word...

A final stage of spiritual maturity is seen in the “fathers” of this passage..

John repeats the same description of father in verse 13 and verse 14...

Fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.

The next stop for a young man is to become a father in the sense of spiritual growth...

And you are going to love this...

But what is the overwhelming characteristic of a mature Christian...

Please notice that spiritual maturity takes us back to where we started..

Spiritual children know God in an emotional way apart from any knowledge that they lack...

Spiritual young men know God better because they have increased their love for Him through the gaining of knowledge about him from the Bible..

And spiritual fathers are simply those who have now come to know God fully because they now know him from the beginning...

And guess what all that knowledge about God does, it causes us to love the Lord even more...

Let me give you an example...

Very early in my relationship with Tonya, I told her that I loved her...

And it was true, but it was an emotional love right that came from being around her and wanting to be around her more...

And as I learned about her and gained more knowledge about her, I knew that I wanted to marry her...

And now after 16 years of marriage, and though I am still learning about her, there is a mature love I have for her now..

I love her more deeply than I did as a 21 year old...

That love was true then, but it is deeper and more complete now because I have learned about her and know her and have lived with her...

Its a love of emotion that is based on knowledge and also experience...

The love that a mature Christian has for God is a love that comes from having the knowledge about God now combined with the experience of walking with God...

Children have the love of God but need the truth to grow...

Young men get the truth but often lose the love of God in the process..

Fathers, have the truth and it causes them to love God all the more...

Let me give you a little example of this from a very well known place in Scripture to kind of anchor these stages of growth to your soul...

Psalm 23:1...

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want...

The spiritual child reads that verse and thinks, "That's so sweet, God is so good."

The spiritual young man reads that verse and preaches it to everyone, "That's the truth about God. You can trust Him."

The spiritual father reads that verse and says, “I know the Shepherd of that verse and he has provided for me every time. I would tell you that He would make a great shepherd to your soul as well.”

And let me add that becoming that spiritual father is where all Christians should aim...

And that leads me to the final principle of spiritual growth....

III. Spiritual Growth Must Be Pursued in Our Life (14)

Even though every church should have fathers, young men, and children in it, that is no excuse not to grow in your walk with the Lord...

Look, the key to growth is to feed on the pure milk of the word of God so that you can grow spiritually...

Put yourself in places where the Bible becomes food for your soul...

Read it daily, sit under good Bible teaching and preaching, practice it daily, memorize it daily, study it daily...

And though your daily exposure to the word of God, seek to know the God of the Word better...

See His mercy.

See His faithfulness..

See His Justice.

See His power.

See His glory and majesty...

And seek to know him better so your can worship
him more fully...

Get in the Word to grow in your walk...

Because it is impossible to come to know God and
not be changed by what you see...

Conclusion

What does this mean for us tonight?

Let me leave you with a couple closing thoughts...

#1 - Be encouraged wherever you are in your walk with the Lord.

I spent nearly 10 years as a spiritual child after I was saved in 1997...

Part of that was laziness on my part...

Part of that was not knowing what a biblical church and biblical preaching and teaching looked like...

And part of that just simple disobedience at time..

I say that to encourage you to get moving, not to offer an excuse to not to grow.

But be encouraged that you still have time to start feeding on God's Word and growing in your knowledge and love of Him.

#2 - Be patient with others.

Though we never excuse laziness or indifference, we need to recognize and appreciate all the stages of growth we see in others..

Instead of complaining about people who can't it together, let us do all we can to help them get it together...

Praise the Lord that he was patient with us...

#3 - Be thankful that our salvation is complete in Christ at the moment of repentance and faith in him.

If you are the thief on the cross or the apostle Paul at the end of his life in terms of spiritual growth, faith and repentance in Christ takes us to the same place when we die...

And praise God for that...

Though people who remain spiritual babies miss out on experiencing the blessing of knowing God better in this life, they will still be with God forever in the life to come...

Help us push them to growth, but help us encourage them to know that they are saved completely regardless of their growth...

And finally...

#4 - Be committed to not being in the same place in your spiritual growth the same time next week, next month, or next year.

There more I study the Bible, the more I realize there is so much more to know...

None of us have arrived or will arrive at a place where we know know perfectly this side of heaven...

In the meantime, help us not be puffed up with pride, but filled with humility ever growing in our knowledge of him...

WA Criswell, one of my heroes of the faith, was a preacher at Dallas First Baptist Church for over 50 years and a pastor for 70 years..

If not for Criswell, Southern Baptist would have gone liberal years ago...

But Criswell stood on the authority of Scripture while other didn't, and God used him mightily to revive the Southern Baptist Convention...

Criswell was committed to expository preaching, and he preached 3 times a week for many years...

And when he came to the end of his life at the age of 92, someone commented that he hoped to one day be as knowledgeable about God as Criswell...

To which Criswell responded, "'After seventy years of expository preaching, I have yet to touch the hem of His garment.'

And may that be true of us as well tonight...

If you are a spiritual child, get in the word and start growing...

If you are a spiritual young man, let the truth you know about God cause you to love Him more.

If you are a spiritual father, resist the pride that tempts you and continue to grow in your love and knowledge of God...

And seek to help others in their growth as well..

Let us Pray.