

Growth and Maturity 1 John 2:12-17

Introduction:

**Doing the will of God requires growth and maturity, and a willingness to be used in the lives of others.**

2:12-14 Children, young men and fathers

**Little children** can either refer to those who are new in the faith, or to all of John's readers – since he uses this term over and over again (2:1, 18, 28 in this chapter alone)

In any event, the **fathers** and **young men** refer to believers in differing stages of Christian growth or maturity – those with more or less experience in the Christian life. A few observations:

2:12 The process of growth starts with our **sins being forgiven**. We have to acknowledge our sin and need for forgiveness before we get anywhere with God.

What helps us to mature in our faith is to realize that the Christian life doesn't stop there. (Yet it never moves so far as to leave this truth behind either.)

2:13 We really **know God**. Sometimes we forget this.

We have **overcome the wicked one**. Satan is defeated. In Christ, we are victorious.

2:14 The key to Christian growth is found in the Word of God – letting it abide in us.

On the one hand John can be referring to Jesus – the living Word. He dwells in us. Our part is to make sure He feels at home there.

If the Word of God is going to abide in us, then we have to abide in the Word.

**John 8:31-32** <sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup>And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

**John 15:7-8** <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, [you will] ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

2:15-17            Learning to love the Father and not the world

John 3:16 says that “God so loved the world,” and in that sense God’s loving the world was a good thing. He desired what was best for the world and gave it what it needed – the sacrificial death of the Son.

When the world and the Father come into conflict, and this happens frequently enough, then that is the place that we have to choose God. We must always prioritize the Father over the world.

2:16     Human desires are not inherently evil, they simply become evil when they demand that we prioritize them over God. In their place, they are designed to serve us. They would rather that we become their slaves: Slaves to our flesh, slaves to covetousness, slaves to our own pride. Pertaining to the flesh:

*“The flesh works to make you forget the design (that you are saved to be holy) and think only of the remedy (if you sin you’ll be forgiven). It preaches half a gospel (a twisted gospel) to us: ‘Go ahead and indulge – it’s already paid for.’ Those who fall prey to such deception are evidently many, since the Scriptures go to such lengths to condemn it.”*

– Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, p.45

Temptation, as we experience it, can usually be categorized into one of these three areas – and often a combination of them.

**James 4:4**        ... Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

#### **Correlating Scripture:**

**Genesis 3:6**     So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

See also the temptations of Jesus in **Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus dealt with every temptation as a true man and not as God.

- He didn’t give in to His flesh by creating bread supernaturally.
- He didn’t give in to the lust of the eyes by coveting the kingdoms of the earth when His purpose in coming that first time was to die for our sins.
- He didn’t give in to the pride of life by indulging in some miraculous spectacle.
- In each case He answered the devil with the Word of God, the Scriptures – from the book of Deuteronomy in each case. That’s why He could respond each time with the tag “It is written...”

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## Five-Part Outline for Our Spiritual Growth:

### 1. Sowing Good Seed

**Mark 4:14**     *The sower sows the word.*

### 2. Forming Strong Roots

**Ephesians 3:17-19**     <sup>17</sup>*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

### 3. Growing in Grace

**2 Peter 3:18**     *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

### 4. Bearing Good Fruit

**Galatians 5:22-23**     <sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

### 5. Multiplication

**Matthew 13:23**     *As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”*

## **Our Vision**

- to Christ
- in Christ
- for Christ

The three phrases **to Christ, in Christ, and for Christ** sum up the vision we have at Horizon Central for each person who calls this church their home. This vision can be expanded as follows:

- Leading others to Christ, as we see in **John 1:40-42**

“One ... who ... followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.”

- Abiding in Christ so that our lives bear much fruit, as Christ explains in **John 15:5**

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

- Being sent for Christ as the Holy Spirit empowers us, according to **Acts 1:8**

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

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## Application:

1. We need to consider what part, if any, we are playing in the vision the Lord has placed before us as a church. Each of us has a role to play in the “to Christ, in Christ, for Christ” process.
  - a. Are we leading others “to Christ”?
  - b. Are we abiding “in Christ”?
  - c. Do we consider ourselves sent “for Christ”? And are we actively helping to send others?
2. We need to consider whether we are engaged in the process of spiritual growth.
  - a. In the earlier stages, we need to make sure that we are engaged in the process ourselves.
    - i. Are we providing good soil for the word that is sown in our hearts?
    - ii. Are we remaining confident of God’s love? Do we trust Him?
    - iii. Are we taking advantage of His grace – in the sense of the power to do His will?
    - iv. We should remind ourselves that Jesus overcame the wicked one in the wilderness, not by using His superpowers, but by responding with the Word of God.
  - b. Sooner or later, we need to put ourselves in the place where we can have an impact on the growth of others.
    - i. Sharing the gospel
    - ii. Discipling or encouraging others in their faith
    - iii. Acts of Christian service, that is, service done unto the Lord. This can be church related, but is not necessarily so. Being a good witness at our job or among our friends and acquaintances is equally needed.
3. We need to consider our relationship to the world. James reminded us that “friendship with the world is enmity with God.”
  - a. If we find that we love the world, that the world entices us with the flesh, the eyes and the pride of life, then we need to reconsider our relationship to it.
  - b. How much is it worth to us to be fully engaged as child of God in our Father’s love?
4. Don’t be deceived by an incomplete gospel that focuses only on your forgiveness and ignores God’s plan for your life.
5. And if none of this is very appealing to us at the moment, consider that the world is passing away. To the extent we invest our lives in spiritual activities with godly motives, we are investing in eternity. To the extent that we are investing in the world, we are wasting all that the Lord has given us – perhaps even our very lives.