

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Growing in Christ

Ephesians 4:15

In this lesson, we will focus on Ephesians 4:15: "*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*" [NIV]. Although clearly we will NEVER become Christ, or "a christ", but we are commanded to be "Christ-like", and clearly we are commanded to "grow". So, let's look at what it means to "grow in Christ".

First of all, we are not simply saved and that's it — done. No, we have a responsibility as part of God's family to grow, to mature, to serve, and to work; and not to simply sit on the sidelines waiting for Christ to return. How do we do that? What does the Bible tell us about growing and maturing? What is our work to be? Those questions will be the focus of this lesson.

I have quoted this before to many in my Bible classes and it's worth repeating here: Cliff Barrows, the Music Director for Billy Graham, is quoted as saying "Everyone wants to grow, but no one wants to change". I believe that an honest look at ourselves will reveal just how true that can be. We desire to grow, however, real growth involves change, sometimes significant change; and at times it can even be painful. We don't like it, and at times will even try to avoid it; but we must change if we are going to grow, mature, and become the witness and servant that Christ expects us to be.

This growing and changing process — this transforming or transformation process of ourselves is often the result of discipleship. We will discuss discipleship further in a moment, but before we do, I wanted to share a warning of sorts about growing, and about helping others grow. One truth that I have learned from over thirty years of teaching God's Word is that we are not all the same. We have different gifts, we learn differently, we grow at different rates, we study differently, and we all have different attributes that set us apart from everyone else. My caution or warning is this: in our drive to grow and to help others grow, take special care that you don't try to do it in a manner that forces everyone to fit your mold.

Chuck Swindoll wrote a book many years ago called "Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life". In it is a little story that I have conveyed to my students from time to time. They remember it because I am usually laughing so hard by the middle of it that I can hardly finish. The title of the story is "A Rabbit on the Swim Team", and although it is really funny, it is also painfully true.

The story is about the animals of nature deciding to organize a school that would help them to better face the challenges of the world. The curriculum had classes in swimming, running, climbing, and flying — all very practical things that animals should learn. Well, you might be able to imagine that as the story goes along, the rabbit excels at running in the Running class but is horrible at swimming in the Swimming class; the duck was adept at swimming but could hardly waddle, let alone run; and so on. The story goes into great detail regarding the frustrations that each of the animals feels as they barely pass, and sometimes even fail, some of the curriculum. The obvious truth is that God never intended for them to be all of the things that they were trying to become.

Similarly, we run that risk sometimes in our approach to discipleship, whether we are teaching someone, or just trying to learn something ourselves. For example, if your gift is teaching, don't assume that your job is to turn everyone into a teacher; and if you have the gift of evangelism, that doesn't mean that everyone has to be an evangelist; and so on. Each of us must seek out the leadership of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit in order to discern God's will for our lives, and what He desires for us to grow in. Don't make the mistake of trying to be the rabbit on the swim team or the duck on the track team as you seek to grow in your walk with Christ.

As we take an honest look at what it means to grow in Christ, and what it means to become a mature and fruitful Christian, let's consider the following questions:

1. Define discipleship. What does it mean?
2. What does it mean to "disciple" someone?
3. How would you define a "mature" Christian? (Be careful; it has nothing to do with age.)
4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. How do these verses apply to our lesson this week?
5. Read Romans Chapter 12 (my favorite chapter in the Bible). It is packed with instruction regarding what it means to grow and to live as a mature Christian. After reading it, cite what the following verses tell us about some of the things that we are to do.
 - a. Romans 12:1
 - b. Romans 12:2
 - c. Romans 12:3
 - d. Romans 12:4-8
 - e. Romans 12:9-13
 - f. Romans 12:14-16
 - g. Romans 12:17-19
 - h. Romans 12:20-21
6. List some ways that you would suggest that we could grow in Christ. How do we go about this task of "growing"? Better yet, how would you suggest we help each other to grow? What are some specific examples or ideas that you can think of that would help others to grow in Christ?

Hopefully, we have discovered some central truths during of study of growing in Christ. Key among those are:

1. We are commanded to grow;
2. Growth means change; and
3. We can't do it alone.

I pray this week that as you study with us, you will ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you ways in which you need to grow and change. I pray that He will also show you ways in which you can help others to grow as well.

May Christ bless you as we continue our studies together.

In Christ,

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