

Briefing Document: Understanding Spiritual Growth-1 John Lesson 30

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Prepared For: General Audience seeking to understand spiritual growth from a Christian perspective.

I. Overarching Purpose of the Epistle of 1 John

The primary purpose of John's epistle is affirmation of salvation for true believers, not to instill doubt. It serves as a guide for readers to "discern their own salvation and discern false professors and false teachers and false prophets." The author emphasizes, "he didn't write to make you have doubts. He wrote so you wouldn't have doubts."

This affirmation is achieved by presenting "tests of true Christianity," including:

- **Doctrinal Test:** Belief in the true Christ and acknowledgement of one's own sinfulness.
- **Moral Test:** Obedience to God and love for others.

The epistle aims to "expose people who deny Christ, expose those who deny their sin... expose people who hate others... expose people who don't obey the Word of God... and expose people who love the world." Ultimately, it ensures believers "may know you have eternal life and that you may believe in the name of the Son of God."

II. Foundational Truths About Salvation and Forgiveness

A core message is that **salvation is fundamentally about the forgiveness of sins, which is a completed act.**

- "Your sins are forgiven because Christ has paid in full the penalty for your sins."
- "One thing is true of all believers wherever they are in their spiritual growth level in their spiritual growth plane: All believers have their sins forgiven."
- "The real reality of salvation is this forgiveness. That's the reality of salvation. Once forgiven, always forgiven."

This forgiveness is "for His name's sake," meaning "for His glory." God's redemptive work, including forgiveness, is ultimately "for His glory."

III. Clarifying Misconceptions About Spiritual Growth

The source strongly refutes several common misconceptions about what constitutes spiritual growth:

1. **Not Related to Standing Before God:** Spiritual growth "has nothing to do with your standing before God in Christ." Once "covered by the blood of Jesus Christ with His righteousness, that's all that matters." An "infant" in faith has the same standing as a "giant."
2. **Not Related to God's Love:** "Spiritual growth has nothing to do with God's love for you. God does not love you more or He does not like you better if you're spiritually mature." God loves believers "to perfection," even when they are "very immature."

3. Not Measured by Time: "Your spiritual growth has nothing to do with time." People can be Christians for "a very long time and they're still very immature," while new believers can be "more mature than some believers that have been believers for decades."
4. Not Solely About Knowledge Acquisition: While understanding God's word is crucial, spiritual maturity "is not related to acquiring biblical information or theology per se." Accumulating facts without application to life, without being "relational with Christ attempting to take upon take upon yourself His image," is "useless" and "dangerous," potentially leading to self-deception about one's true state.
5. Not Determined by Activity: "Spiritual growth has nothing to do with your activity," including "church activity [or] church ministry." Even "heads of ministries" can be "tragically immature."
6. Not Indicated by Temporal Success: Spiritual growth "has nothing to do with temporal success," "material goods," "the size of the church," or "the level of influence you have on people." Paul is cited as an example of spiritual maturity despite suffering and having "nothing."

These points serve to "clear off our desk [and] get the clutter away from us so we can think about it."

IV. The Nature of Spiritual Growth: Relative and Absolute Fluctuations

Spiritual maturity is described as **relative, yet with absolute moments**:

- "Spiritual maturity is not absolute. It is relative." This means "it can be one way or the other way. It's relative to the conditions."
- At "any given moment, you are either in the spirit or you're in the flesh." This momentary state is "absolute."
- "Your maturity then is a relative thing... Your maturity is relative to you as you grow."
- Growth only occurs when one is "spiritual": "The only times you grow are the times when you're spiritual." When "fleshly," one "actually fall back."
- "Spiritual growth is the relative spiritual development of a person through all the accumulated times of walking in the spirit. ...the more you walk in the spirit, the more you grow." There is no "neutrality in spirituality"; you're "either going forward or you're going backwards."

V. The Process of Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is presented as a **process, not a mystical or instantaneous event**:

- "Spiritual growth is not mystical. It's not voodoo. Spiritual growth is not sentimental. Spiritual growth is not devotional. It's not psychological. Spiritual growth is not due to your experience. It's not due to an event. It's not due to a decision. It's not due to rededication. It's not due to secret insight."
- It is a "process of feeding your spirit so you can develop in the spiritual dimension of your life."
- The essential element for growth is understanding God's truth: "You can't grow spiritually unless you grow in understanding in your understanding of God's truth."

- This is likened to physical growth, where "life is growth. Growth comes by eating." Spiritually, the food is "every word that comes out of the mouth of God."
- "Spiritual growth is directly related to an increase in your understanding of God's revelation as it is revealed to you through his word, through the circumstances of your life, through your prayers, etc. etc. etc."

Scriptural descriptions of spiritual growth include: "following after righteousness," "being transformed by the renewing of your mind," "perfecting holiness and the fear of God," "pressing towards the goal," and "being built up in your faith."

VI. Stages of Spiritual Growth

The text in 1 John categorizes spiritual growth into three stages, using a human analogy: "children, young men, and fathers." While there's a "whole continuum," these categories help illustrate the framework of growth.

The initial address to "little children" (Greek: *teknia*, meaning "born ones" or "little darlings") encompasses all believers, regardless of their stage of maturity. The key point is that John writes to them "because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." This reinforces the truth that even "spiritual babies" have full forgiveness and a secure standing before God.

VII. Implications for Believers

- Assurance: The epistle aims to confirm a believer's salvation by showing how their life aligns with the "tests of true Christianity."
- Encouragement: There is "room in the kingdom for spiritual babies... spiritual young men... [and] spiritual fathers." Not all are expected to live out perfect obedience immediately, acknowledging the reality of growth stages.
- Call to Action: Growth is an "obligation," and it occurs through conscious effort to walk in the spirit by obeying and understanding God's word.
- **Humility:** Understanding that spiritual growth is not tied to outward measures like activity, success, or even accumulated knowledge without application, fosters humility and a focus on genuine transformation.

Greek Words Used in This Briefing Document

teknia (Phonetic: TEK-nee-ah): A Greek term meaning 'little children' or 'born ones,' often used affectionately to refer to believers.