

Lesson #22

Five Levels of Christian Growth

Training and Ministry

Growing up from infancy, coming to a place of maturity and being able to support others is a normal progression, in the natural and in the spiritual. From the book of Hebrews we saw that learning the foundational teachings and putting them into practice results in growth and spiritual maturity (see Heb 5:12-6:2). There are plenty of other places in the Bible that encourage us to grow to maturity. Peter tells new Christians to “...desire the pure milk of the word that you may **grow** thereby...” (see 2 Peter 2:2). The purpose of the ministry gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are “...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the **fullness of Christ**” (see Ephesians 4:12-13.)

God can use anyone, including the immature, to minister to others, but in general, the time for ministry comes after a time of equipping and training. Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy saying:

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

Christian practice can be divided into two general categories: 1) ***Training in Righteousness***, as mentioned in the passage above, and 2) the ***Ministry of Righteousness***, which is mentioned in the passage below:

⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

— 2 Corinthians 3:9 (NASB)

The passage containing the foundational principles speaks of the ministry of righteousness being for the mature, calling it *the word of righteousness*:

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the **word of righteousness**, for he is a babe.

¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

— Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV- emphasis added)

From this passage we can conclude the following regarding Christian growth:

- Training in Righteousness is for immature Christians, Ministry of righteousness is for those who are of full age.
- Training in Righteousness is the milk and the Ministry of Righteousness is the Meat.
- Training is when we are learning, ministry is when we are teaching.
- Training is when we are receiving, ministry is when we are giving ministry.

Levels of Growth

As we have seen, there are many ways of applying the five foundation principles to life experience. Below we will look at how the five principles correspond to five levels of growth, with the first three representing training and the last two representing ministry.

Level 1: Believer

To become a Christian and therefore a member of Christ's body (the church) is a simple matter of believing the word of God and having faith - we are saved by grace through faith. This kind of faith produces repentance and a change of heart often referred to the new birth. To many, becoming a believer (being saved from eternal damnation), is the entire goal. But this is only the beginning of the Christian life. This is why Peter says, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2 - NKJV). Believing corresponds to the first foundational principle, repentance from dead works and faith toward God.

Level 2: Follower

Believers who continue in the faith and seek more of God than simply believing become followers. Those who follow Jesus soon recognize the need for continued transformation, something often referred to as sanctification, holiness, mind renewal, etc. To follow Jesus is to embrace the second principle which is called baptisms or washings.

Notice the plurality of these words. There are many steps one must take on the journey of sanctification. In most cases, the first step of transformation taken by a follower is water baptism. Through an encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus, Paul (Saul) became a believer. Immediately, he followed the instructions he was given and went to the house of a man named Ananias who said to him:

¹⁶ And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

— Acts 22:16 (NKJV)

Level 3: Disciple

The next level of growth is discipleship. To be a disciple is more than simply following; it is to become a pupil who is in training to emulate the ways of the Lord. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who has been fully trained will be like his teacher (see Luke 6:40). In discipleship we develop a relationship with mature Christian teachers and receive an impartation (see 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7,17). Discipleship therefore corresponds to the third foundational principle, The Laying on of Hands.

A discipleship relationship is not a denial of our individual relationship with God, but a recognition that we cannot stand alone. This is God’s design to keep us from becoming too independent and enter into deception (see 1 Cor 12). God deposits His riches in imperfect human vessels and calls them pour it out to others. It is the disciple’s place to receive the impartation God has for us from them. There may be times when a church or its leaders stray so far from the truth that remaining there is unwise and moving on is the right thing to do (see 2 Cor 6:17). There may also be times when we are led by the Holy Spirit to move or must expand the circles from which we receive impartation. But if we want to be disciples, we must stick it out where God has placed us and receive the impartation God has for us there.

Level 4: Witness

The next level of growth after being a disciple is to be a witness. It is one thing to *witness* and quite another to “*be*” a witness. Being a witness includes demonstrating the power of the coming kingdom. Jesus said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you and you shall be witnesses to me” (Acts 1:8). In Acts 4:33, it is recorded that the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power and Paul described his preaching as a demonstration of the Spirit and power (see 2 Cor 12:12). Because a witness demonstrates the kingdom, which will appear at the resurrection, this level of growth corresponds to the fourth foundational principle, The Resurrection of the Dead. Being a witness moves us out of training in righteousness into the ministry of righteousness.

Level 5: Teacher

The person who moves into the Ministry of Righteousness is becoming mature and will undoubtedly influence others. This is to become a teacher. Moving on to maturity (perfection), is the main point of the passage containing these first principles of the oracles of God. Those being addressed should have been grown up and should have been teaching others, but they were still immature and were still in need of being trained or taught.

¹² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

...

¹ Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [***maturity***], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ... - Hebrews 5:12; 6:1 (NKJV- emphasis added)

Notice, again from Hebrews 6:1, that we leave the “*discussion*” of the elementary principles, not the practice of them. The point has been made in this study that, although these elementary/foundational principles are called the “milk of the word,” the meat or “solid food” is not necessarily a something different. The ability to eat meat is the ability to teach and provide milk for others.

The Greek word for teacher is *didaskalos*. It is translated *master* more often than *teacher*. Most anyone can be used by God to teach on some level. But when one is of full age and becomes one that others look to and follow, there is greater level of responsibility that we should be aware of. James warns about the level of responsibility and accountability that comes with being a teacher.

¹ My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

— James 3:1 (NKJV)

Teachers who partake of solid food and feed others must discern good and evil (see Heb 5:14). These are overseers who watch over the souls of others (see Heb 13:17). Discerning good and evil is essentially that same as judging. In his role of teacher and overseer, Paul, had to make such judgments as demonstrated by the circumstance where he delivered a person over to the destruction of their flesh that their soul might be saved saying: "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed" (1 Cor 5:3 NKJV). Also see Titus 1:10-16 and Acts 5:1-11. For this reason, this level of growth corresponds with the fifth foundational principle: Eternal Judgement.

Summary Chart

The chart below condenses and summarizes the points made in this lesson.

Level of Growth	Foundational Principle	Category
Believer	Repentance from dead works and faith toward God	Training In Righteousness
Follower	Doctrines of Baptisms (Washings)	
Disciple	Laying on of Hands	
Witness	Resurrection of the Dead	Ministry of Righteousness
Teacher	Eternal Judgment	