

Intro:

VIII. Stages of Spiritual Growth -

A. Normal Spiritual Growth

1. It is God's purpose for us to become like Christ - Ro 8:29
 - a. It requires His work - Phil 1:6
 - b. It requires the believer's involvement - Phil 2:12 - Work out; 2 Pet 3:18 - Grow
 - c. It is to be the goal of the believer, - **Phil 3:13-14**
 - d. but only happens in finality when we see Christ - 1 Jo 3:2
2. Misconceptions to be avoided
 - a. Spiritual growth (success or failure) does not determine the believer's standing before God - Eph 1:6; Heb 10:14
 - b. Spiritual growth (success or failure) does not affect God's love for Believers - Jo 13:1; Ro 5:8
 - c. Spiritual growth is not measured by the calendar - **Heb 5:11-14**
 - d. Spiritual growth is unrelated to the amount of theological knowledge - **Heb 5:11-14**
 - e. Spiritual growth is unrelated to outward successful ministry activity - **Jas 3:17-18**
 - f. Spiritual growth is not mystical, sentimental, or psychological
 - i. not based on rededication or religious decisions
 - ii. not based on emotional experience or good feelings
3. Spiritual Growth results from the process of
 - a. taking in God's truth - Ro 12:2
 - b. believing it and applying it - **Jas 1:22-25**

B. General Reassurance - vs 12

1. I write to you, little children,
 - a. I write or have written used 6 times here to emphatically state that his message was for his readers
 - b. *teknion* - an infant, darlings (Christian converts):--little children.
 - i. lit born ones
 - ii. Speaking of offspring in a general sense
 - iii. NT writers commonly describe believers as the children of God - Jo 13:33; 1 Jo 2:1,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21
2. Because your sins are forgiven you
 - a. NT clearly states that all believers are forgiven
 - i. no matter where they are in the spiritual growth process - Ro 8:1
 - ii. Of all their sins - 1Jo 1:7; Mt 26:28; **Ac 26:18; Col 1:14; 2:13-14**
 - b. foundational truth of Christian faith
 - i. disciples told to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins - Lu 24:47
 - ii. Not a new concept in the NT, comes from the OT - **Ps 32:1-2; 86:5; 103:12; 130:3-4; Is 1:18-19; 43:25; 44:22**
3. for His name's sake.
 - a. expression refers to God's glory - De 28:58; Ne 9:5; **Ps 8:1; Isa 42:8; 48:11**
 - b. God forgives sins b/c
 - i. it brings Him glory for His superabundant grace, mercy, and power
 - ii. believers will forever praise and magnify God - **2 Co 4:15; Rev 5:11-13**

C. Specific Assurance to Spiritual Fathers - vs 13a, 14a

1. I write to you, fathers,
 - a. 3rd stage of spiritual growth
 - b. not merely understanding doctrine intellectually, having moved into a deeper relationship with God
2. Because you have known Him
 - a. *ginosko* - to "know" (absolutely)--allow, be aware (of), feel, (have) know(-ledge), perceived, be resolved, can speak, be sure, understand.
 - b. Spiritual fathers have meditated on the depths of God's character, they have gained a deeper, fuller knowledge of God
3. who is from the beginning - Ps 90:2; 102:25-27; Ro 1:20;

D. Specific Assurance to Spiritual Young Men - vs 13b, 14b

1. I write to you, young men,
 - a. *neaniskos* - a youth (under forty)--young man.
 - b. 2nd stage of spiritual growth takes the believer from
 - i. an emphasis on a basic relationship to an emphasis on biblical revelation
 - ii. Being primarily focused on devotion to God to being concerned with clarity of doctrine
 - c. spiritual young men are characterized by
 - i. They have outgrown childish self-absorption w/ feelings and moved to a biblical worldview - Because you are strong,
 - ii. an understanding of scriptural truth - the word of God abides in you
2. Because you have overcome the wicked one.
 - a. Satan's primary emphasis is not on tempting people to sin - Jas 1:14
 - b. He works through manifold false religious systems to deceive the world and lead most to damnation - 2 Co 10:3-5; 11:13-15; Eph 6:11-12
 - c. young men armed w/ sound doctrine refute error and guard truth

E. Specific Assurance to Spiritual Children - vs 13c

1. I write to you, little children,
 - a. *paidion* - a childling (of either sex), an infant, or a half-grown boy or girl; an immature Christian:--(little, young) child, damsel.
 - b. denotes more specifically children under parent's tutelage
 - i. ignorant and immature
 - ii. Still in need of care and guidance
2. Because you have known the Father.
 - a. children have a basic knowledge of their parents
 - b. Immature spiritual children know the Father - Ps 9:10; Ro 8:15; Ga 4:6
 - i. ignorance makes spiritual children prone to weakness and highly susceptible to dangers - **Heb 5:12-13**
 - ii. Often motivated by fleshly desires and lack of discernment to avoid what is harmful
 - iii. Often attach themselves to spiritual heroes/ favorite teachers - 1 Co 3:4
 - iv. Often are easy victims to false teachers - Ac 20:29-30

F. Progressing from a spiritual child to a spiritual young man to a spiritual fathers

1. through the life-giving, life-transforming, application of the word of God
2. by reading, studying, memorizing, meditating on, and applying bible truth in every situation
3. being transformed by the power of the Spirit
4. **Jo 17:19-26**