

Outline

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Introduction

I knew a boy who came from a broken family and was never able to be a little boy. He needed to grow up quickly. After his father left, he was told that he was the man of the house. Soon, he lost all his youth and became a hopeless boy with grown-up worries. His life was a constant struggle because he never was able to grow-up but had to act like he did. His youth was gone and he never got to live it.

I knew a girl who was rejected at home and never had the love she sought nor needed. She was a failure in her families eyes because she was not as beautiful nor as smart as the other girls. She tried to live a normal childhood but never was able to because her family never excepted her. She turned to others for attention and love. She began to sell herself to get the attention and love she needed. She started to do grown-up things without ever living her life as a child. She never matured but did mature things.

I guess one of the hardest things to see is a child playing grown-up whether by choice or be force. Rebecca was the hardest for me to see. She never made it to her twelfth birthday. Oh, she turned twelve, but she never lived it as a twelve year old. She lived it as a mother of a child and not as a child. Can you imagine the pain of this girl who wanted to be accepted by her parents as a child but wasn't. Who sought their love through another man and missed her childhood altogether as she equated sex with love. This is a child playing a grown-up game that the media has taught us.

I firmly believe that children should be children, experiencing the joys and heartaches of childhood. The joy of learning to ride a bicycle and the pain of falling off one. The joy of puppy love and the heartache of break-ups. The joy of baseball and dolls. Yet sin has entered the world and provided destruction of childhood. For some it is pre-marital sex destroying the natural progression of growth. For others it is a decision placed upon them through divorce that causes them to lose their childhood. But one that I have noticed more and more today is the willful choice of some children to skip their childhood altogether and be adults. We laughed at it when we watched "North." The little boy who ran the world from his business office. We saw a child doing grown-up things like controlling the lives of others (both grown-ups and other children), setting people up to be killed, destroying peoples lives and the like. We laughed because it was out of character for a little boy to do such things.

Today, we see too many children wilfully giving up their childhood to do what grown-ups do. They seek the maturity without the experience. Their desire is to get to the far side of life, enjoy all the privileges of the older generations without all their pitfalls. They seek the privileges but not the experience of pain, joy, sadness, pleasure that got them there. They want a quick and painless growth. Instant tea, instant coffee, fast food, why not fast and instant growth?

This is not only true in the physical world but is true in the spiritual as-well. I have seen babes in Christ pushed into service they cannot handle and so dwarfed their spiritual progress. I have seen babes in Christ choose to ignore growth for the sake of maturity. How ironic, how can you mature without growth? You cannot.

I have seen countless people desiring to skip the stages of sanctification, spiritual growth, to avoid the pains of growing. I have seen people seeking experiences to lift them out of their childhood to maturity rather than seeking discipline and strength through that. I have seen, to put it bluntly, some of us struggling with our sins (as a child would) but not wanting to tackle it we seek an experience to lift us from it. We tend to take every opportunity to allow God to take us from our bondage of sin or our habit that haunts us or the sin that so easily entangles us without wanting to struggle through the discipline needed to overcome the sin on our own. I remember a time in my own Christian life that I had a struggle

with sin that was destroying me. I lost daily in my battle. It was a constant struggle to make it through each day in victory. The fight overwhelmed me. One day I decided that I would let God take it from me. It sounds spiritual enough but, honestly speaking, I didn't want to deal with it anymore and I figured He would. The problem was I would have victory for a moment and then the pain and struggle would set back in. I was seeking out a single experience to deliver me to holiness. After some time on this rollercoaster I began to realize there is no holiness, godliness, Christlikeness, spirituality without a struggle. God doesn't want instant maturity or else He would have given it to each one of us. He wants us to daily be conformed to His image through discipline and a desire to be like Him. Not through some magical formulae that will render us godly by experiencing it or saying it. God's desire is for us to come to Him on a daily basis in a reverential fear of who He is, with a desire to know Him more. The beginning of wisdom and knowledge is this fear of God. We come to Him daily seeking strength for the day. We come to Him, daily seeking to know Him better. We cannot come to Him through one experience and say we have arrived. I tried that path in the 80's and ended in failure everytime. Satan placed that carrot in front of me (instant growth, like Eve could be like God instantly). I like what Michael Card titled one of his songs: Joy in the Journey. We need to see this, it is not so much the goal (except that we press on towards Christlikeness) as it is the journey that makes us who we are. First John 3.1f tells us that it is the journey toward Christ and the knowledge of Him that makes us godly and pure as He is. It is not some transcendental experience but a daily living with Jesus that transforms and makes us whole.

I have seen a move within Christian circles in the past few years that has bothered me. The move is toward a godliness or maturity that is unbiblical. The goal of maturation is admirable for it is Scriptural it is to be our life goal. But the methods employed today leave God's plan and method out. I have seen some of us falling prey to this philosophy of experiential living. That is to say, we seek an experience with God to deliver us to Him while God says that we need to know Him. Or as Paul says, to know Him and the power of His resurrection and in His sufferings (as did Peter and John). We seek victory over sin by going to a meeting where we might experience the touch of God. We seek to be grown in Christ without growing in Christ. Without the struggles of childhood and adolescence. We seek to be men and women of God without first growing-up in Him. We seek Proverbs 20.29 without the struggles that brought these people there:

The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.

We seek the strength of a young man without going through the battles of youth. We seek the wisdom of age without the learning of life. This is an abominable thing before man in the physical realm and before God in the spiritual. He receives glory as we grow daily in our life not as we seek to play grown-up games while yet children.

Let us look into the passage as we consider the aspects of growth in fellowship with God more fully:

1. Little Children (12,13)

2.12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 . . . I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

John writes to the Ephesians as a father to his children. We must understand that John is near 100 years old and that anybody would be as a child to him, but more specifically, he writes to those who are his children in God. To the church he pastored. I will always consider each one of you here as a child because you are growing up under my tutelage. John writes to the children in the faith and let's us know how we can know we are children in the faith. That is that we are born again, believers of Christ, joint heirs with Him in salvation. He writes:

1 John 2.12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. In Ephesians Paul tells us:

Ephesians 1.7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Ephesians 4.29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

We have received forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus. Therefore we need to daily live in that forgiveness and draw closer to God on a daily basis. leaning upon the direction of the Holy Spirit and daily getting rid of childhood things as we grow into all aspects of Christ. I think it is of interest to note that Paul wrote verse 31 right after speaking of our salvation in Christ and our indwelling by the Spirit. He does so to contrast the way in which we live-either in growing in Christ from childhood to adolescence to adulthood or we wallow in childhood and act childish. We start with forgiveness but don't end their. We cannot become mature if we do not understand this important point: we need to know we are forgiven isn't this the reason John wrote:

1 John 1.9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

For us to fight battles and be victorious in our Christianity we need to know we are forgiven, clothed in the righteousness of God. It was no mistake in Paul's writing that he placed our position and victory in Christ before our spiritual battles as he wrote Ephesians. We need to know we are forgiven before we can battle the Tempter, the Evil One, Satan and his hosts. Before victory is live out in our lives we need to know and believe the truth that God has cleansed us and set us free in His Son. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world, the God who dwells within us is greater by far than Satan who is in the world (two great truths that John writes of later in 1 John.).

Our sins are forgiven on account of Jesus. We know the greatness of our forgiveness as we come to know Him better. This is not some one time experience that draws us closer but a continual knowing on a day to day basis the God of our salvation.

13 . . . I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

We are children in Christ as we accept His forgiveness and we are true children as we seek to experience the Father through His Word and His people, as we seek fellowship with Him. As we know the Father we grow. As we search His Word we grow. As we seek His fellowship and the fellowship of the saints (1 John 1.1-4) we grow. We don't grow, as a rule, by a one shot experience. We grow on a daily basis as we come before God and know Him as Father.

It is the next step in Christianity that most people are desirous to skip and go straight into maturity. This is the struggle with Satan and his temptation, the world and ourselves.

1 John 2.13 . . . I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. 14 . . . I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

As we see from this, only those who overcome in a struggle with this world are strong in God. Other passages point this out for us:

1 John 4.4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

1 John 5.4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Revelation 2.7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

We need to see our need for victory in Christ. We need to see that we are in a daily battle that demands we lean of God for victory. We need to see we overcome Satan by the blood of Christ (forgiveness of little children) and the testimony of the Saints (the overcoming of the young ones).

1 John 2.13 . . . I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

For me, it is of interest that John writes how these young men overcome and it is not by a one shot deal but by "hiding His Word in our hearts" that we overcome the Evil One. It is by having the Word of God, which is alive and active, within us. It is through a daily discipline of living out the Word of God.

1 John 2.14 . . . I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

This is the crux of Christianity. Once we know we are saved and have God's guarantee of salvation we can overcome any foe, natural or supernatural; as inanimate as sin or as personal as people. We are victors in Christ as we seek Him daily. When we know Him better and more intimately through His Word and fellowship with others, we can have greater victories and triumphs in Christ. Salvation begins as we come to God in fear of who He is but must continue as we know Him more and allow Him to work in and through us. This is growing to know Christ more fully. This is the victory we have, this is eternal life: knowing God.

This also leads us to our final goal, station in life as Christians: the fathers.

1 John 2.13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

It is interesting to note that John doesn't differ the qualities of the father. He gives two descriptions for both children and young men but repeats himself for fathers: the have known Him who is from the beginning. This is God in all that He is: Father, Son, and Spirit:

Father: Isaiah 41.4 Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord--with the first of them and with the last--I am he."

Son: 1 John 1.1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

Spirit: Proverbs 8.23 I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.

The single point I would like to make here is that we can know when we have reached partial maturity in Christ and that is when we can rest in God alone. Too many of us seek to be here, and it is a good place to be, but we cannot be here unless we have lived through childhood and adolescence. We cannot trust and rest completely in a God we do not know nor have not seen work in us on a daily basis. We need the truth of salvation to be so embedded within us to provide us with the basis for the victories we need to trust God and know Him deeper. We need the full-circle of life to occur within us if we are to grow into all aspects of Him. We need to be in His Word and in fellowship with each other in order to come to maturity, to come to know Him.

As I read through the Bible I see this truth become clearer daily. We come to God in reverential fear, some in total terror. And this is the beginning of knowledge and salvation. As we learn to trust Him more

by knowing Him more we grow closer to Him. When time has gone by and life has been lived, that fear turns to trust and turns to love. This is what John is showing us here. As we get to know Him as children it is in awe and fear, as we get to know Him as young men in our daily battles we begin to trust Him more for strength in battles, as we get to know Him more as fathers we love Him more.

I see this as the ultimate goal of our earthly life. I know a man who is as close to this as I can imagine. When I asked him about his health and possible death, his answer was God. When I asked him about his fears and apprehensions, it was God. He meant by this: My life is in God's hands, whether I live or die it is for God. His greatest fear, if there is one, was that He we dishonour God. Sounds like Paul in Philippians doesn't it? Paul said he wanted to know Jesus and his greatest fear was to somehow bring the majesty of God down to something common.

As of this moment, I am fighting many battles and I wouldn't change it for a moment. I see the light of God in all the darkness I am in. In the future I can see me answering some person's question with God. I pray for that day to come. There will be a day when each one of us, as we persevere in Christ and live our lives daily in fellowship with Him and His people, will say: "God!" and mean He is the ultimate answer to every question or thing raised by man. In Him we stand and we will know that the daily battles were all worth it, the daily disciplines were worth it, the daily grind to know Him was the only way to go.

Conclusion

I would like to quote one more verse as we close. This verse pertains to the daily struggle and where our strength and hope come from, memorize it and live it as you grow into maturity. As you live out your childhood and adolescence in Christ remember:

Isaiah 40.30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

May our Lord bless you as you seek Him and His fellowship daily.

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