



# GROWING INTO CHRIST

by Dale Rumble

## PREFACE

As we grew up through childhood years to become adults, there were two ways, in particular, in which we monitored our growth progress. The first one was in the many trips we made to mirrors, where we self-consciously examined the changes taking place in new teeth, skin blemishes, hair styling, developing muscles, etc. It seemed as though we would never grow up! The second way was centered in our parent's expectations of us and their instructions to us, which addressed areas such as behavior, dress codes, social etiquette, education, etc. These changed over the years as we went through the different phases of childhood. In one case we observed ourselves in a mirror; in the second case we listened to our parents' counsel over the years and to their plans for our life.

There is a parallel to these two observations in spiritual growth, and there is also a great difference. In physical growth, everything is time dependent. No matter how much we might want to grow up quickly, it always took three years for a ten year old to become a teenager. However, in spiritual development, time no longer has the same constraint. Some new converts grow in Christ very quickly, while others grow more slowly; and sad to say, a

few believers will never exhibit any significant growth in spiritual affairs over their life time.

This booklet has been written to point out various levels of spiritual growth, and to show how one may use Scripture as a mirror to examine their personal progress. It also addresses how our Father in heaven speaks to us concerning His expectations for us as we grow spiritually.

The issue is *not* “going to heaven”, but of fulfilling the call and purpose God has for our life. The following verse expresses the challenge we face:

*But speaking the truth in love we are to **grow up in all aspects into Him**, who is the Head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)*

## **LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR**

In a manner similar to how young people use a mirror to view physical changes taking place in their bodies as they grow up, the right hand side of the chart can serve as a mirror for spiritual growth. It contains specific words, that in the original Greek text, identifies specific levels of spiritual maturity (reading from the bottom to the top). These words constitute a mirror by which a believer can evaluate his progress (2 Corinthians 3:18). Since exact meaning of the words is important in a translation, they are shown in their original Greek form along with their equivalent meaning in English.

Spiritual growth cannot begin apart from a spiritual birth. Thus, the first level is defined by the word, “BREPHOS” meaning a “new born babe”.

*Like newborn babes (BREPHOS), long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Peter 2:2)*

The most important factor related to growth for anyone at the beginning of their spiritual life is a hunger for

God's word. It is a major, determining criteria for all subsequent growth, for the Lord reveals Himself and His ways through His word to us. We should *never* lose this hunger to know His word better.

The Greek word on the chart immediately above "BREPPOS" is "NEPIOS", which identifies a second level of spiritual stature, one which occurs after a person has been saved for a period of time. Various translations of this word are: "a child without words", "a minor", "a spiritually immature person" and "a babe". The significance of this word in the sense of spiritual growth can be seen in the context of the following verses where it is used:

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of **flesh**, as to **babes** (NEPIOS) in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it — For since there is **jealousy** and **strife among you**, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, '**I am of Paul**', and another, '**I am of Apollos**', are you not mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)*

Here we recognize jealousy, carnal accusations, gossip, cliques, sectarianism, and following a man more than the Lord, as marks of a "NEPIOS".

*As a result (i.e. of growing up) we are no longer to be **children** (NEPIOS), **tossed here and there by waves**, and **carried about by every wind of doctrine**, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:4)*

An "up today, down tomorrow" attitude because of changing circumstances, and a desire to always seek out new doctrines rather than becoming grounded in basics of the faith, are also evidences of a "NEPIOS".

*Now I say, as long as the heir is a **child** (NEPIOS), he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and manag-*

*ers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were **children** (NEPIOS), were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. (Galatians 4:1-3)*

Verses 4-19 of this fourth chapter show that the context of Paul's instruction to the Galatian Christians was, that if they continued to fall back into legalism, they would be reverting back to a "NEPIOS" level of stature. Maturity could *only* be realized as they walked according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-4). Thus legalism is another characteristic of one who is a "NEPIOS".

*Concerning Him (i.e. Jesus) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have **come to need milk and not solid food**. For **everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness**, for he is a **babe** (NEPIOS). (Hebrews 5:11-13)*

One who is unable to instruct others how to walk in victory because, as yet, he himself does not have a consistent walk in righteousness, is also a "NEPIOS".

One would not expect to find any one believer exhibiting all of the character traits of a "NEPIOS", but all new believers will manifest one or more of them to some degree. This is inevitable, for they reflect our fallen human nature. They are to be seen as marks of one's second (spiritual) childhood; something we must all go through if we are to grow up into Christ. It is not the behavior of a "NEPIOS" that is the problem; it is when one *remains* in that state without changing that is wrong. The characteristics of a "NEPIOS" are simply manifestations of the human nature that have not yet experienced death at the cross of Christ. Ideally, by faith, they should begin to disappear at water baptism.

It is important that we recognize these character flaws when they occur, not only in our own life, but also in the lives of those who we are discipling.

In summary, the following behavioral traits mark a “NEPIOS” level of spiritual childhood:

- Jealousy, strife and envy.
- Cliques; following some believer more than Christ.
- Continually tossed about by problems, issues and circumstances, whether secular or spiritual.
- “Up” today, and “down” tomorrow.
- Tendency to run after new doctrines.
- Susceptible to cultic and unscriptural overtures, or the charisma of a spokesman for such things.
- Legalistic life style and emphasis.
- Continual need for reinstruction on basic doctrines; unable to instruct others in this area. Such persons would not be faithful in fundamental things, such as prayer, tithes, service, etc.
- Poor spiritual insight and little development of spiritual judgment.

There is one more observation to be made concerning a “NEPIOS”. When the seventy disciples were sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel of the kingdom, they returned with joy to Him and reported that even the demons were subject to them in His name. To His Father in prayer, Jesus said,

*I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to **babes** (NEPIOS). (Luke 10:21)*

The point is, even a “NEPIOS” has power and authority over demons! If we have been born of the Spirit, then greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world!

We are responsible to appropriate His provisions that enable us to put off the old man and put on the new. This is how one grows into Christ. The following scripture verse clearly shows that this transition is expected of all who are saved. We are not to remain babes!

*When I was a **child** (NEPIOS), I used **to speak** as a **child** (NEPIOS), **think** as a **child** (NEPIOS), **reason** as a **child** (NEPIOS); when I became a man, I **did away with childish** things (i.e. traits of a NEPIOS). (1 Corinthians 13:11)*

At this time, I would expect some readers to question why pride was not listed as a characteristic of a “NEPIOS”. The answer is that pride and carnal self-seeking are behind *each* and *every* “NEPIOS” trait. Pride *must* be dealt with to overcome these sins and to grow in Christ. When believers will not humble themselves in repentance, and honestly see themselves as the Lord sees them, they will remain a “NEPIOS”. There is *never* a time, at *any* level of stature, when we are not to be humble and broken individuals before Him (Proverbs 11:2, 16:5, 18-19, 29:23; Isaiah 2:17).

The third level of spiritual growth is represented by the word “NEANISKOS”, which means “a young man”. Its use in scripture suggests a victorious warrior in the prime of life, one who has defeated his enemy.

*I have written to you **young men** (NEANISKOS), because you are **strong**, and **the word of God abides** in you, and you **have overcome the evil one**. (1 John 2:14)*

This verse does not refer to a “NEPIOS” who has just been baptized in the Spirit. It points to one strong in the Spirit who is well established in the word of God. It is one who has recognized that his mind is the *primary* battleground with Satan, and has dealt with those areas of weakness that could become footholds or fortresses of

influence for the enemy to attack him. The thought patterns that mark how a “NEPIOS” *thinks, reasons and speaks* are where the weapons of the Spirit must *first* be applied to being forth the transition to a “NEANISKOS”.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying **speculations** (i.e. human reasoning) and every **lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God**, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ . . . (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*

The spiritual stature of a “NEANISKOS” is a standard for those who make up the Lord’s army in the closing days of this age, and for all who do spiritual warfare.

“PATERS” is the word marking the fourth measure of growth into Christ. The word means “fathers”. Whatever the Lord has revealed to us by the anointing of His Spirit in the way of truth, is never for us alone; once we have become established in new dimensions of His life, we are expected to teach and impart into others what the Lord has built into us. We are to father others. This can involve leading the unsaved to Christ as Paul did the Corinthian believers, or discipling a convert toward maturity as a son, such as Paul’s discipling of Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:1-2). “PATERS” is not a title or an official position; it is ministry based on relationship. The Lord is raising up fathers today to train sons to become warriors in His army for the warfare that lies ahead (Malachi 4:5-6).

It might appear that once one had attained the fourth level he has reached maturity. Such is not the case! One of the *most important* characteristics of any Christian who is truly growing into Christ, is an ever greater realization that they have *not yet* arrived, nor have they attained the completion of that to which they have been called. The reason for this is quite simple; the more inti-

mately we know Him and His ways, the more clearly we see how far short we are in comparison to Him. One's humility and appreciation of this difference will *always* increase as they grow in the Spirit. Thus, there is an attitude of mind that we must have if we are to continue to make true progress. Paul expressed it well:

*Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but **I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.** Brethren, **I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;** but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** Let us therefore, as many as are perfect (i.e. mature, complete), have this attitude . . . (Philippians 3:12-15)*

The goal, the final level, that we have all been called toward is expressed by the word "TELEIOS", which means, "having reached its end", "to complete", "to mature", "to perfect". The context of the verses in which this word appears, expresses the thought of having attained to *all* that God's grace was extended to us, either to be or to do. This is the highest level of our growth.

*Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a **mature** (TELEIOS) man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness (i.e. fulfillment; a filling up) of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)*

*But solid food is for the **mature** (TELEIOS) who because of practice have their **senses trained to discern good and evil.** (Hebrews 5:14)*

*For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble **in what he says,** he is a **perfect** (TELEIOS) man, able to bridle the whole body as well. (James 3:2)*



The previous four levels primarily considered our personal growth in the Lord. However, another, *very important* character attribute of anyone who is mature in spiritual things will be the love of Christ in his heart for *all others* who are children of God. This love will distinguish a truly mature individual *more than anything else!* (Ephesians 3:17-19) Our covenant relationship to others in the body of Christ is an essential parameter of our growth in Christ.

*I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be **perfected** (TELEIOO) in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (John 17:23)*

The goal of the Lord is not simply to raise up mature individual disciples, but to have a “perfected” body, with Himself as the Head. He is seeking to bring forth a corporate completeness in His people. The church is to become the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 1:23).

## **OUR FATHER’S EXPECTATIONS**

Just as the right side of the chart serves as a mirror to evaluate our growth in the Spirit, so also the left side expresses how God views our relationship to Him as sons and His expectation of us. The key word is “HUIOS”, which means “sons”.

Again, this relationship *must* begin with the new birth. We only become spiritual sons through a spiritual birth.

*For you are all **sons** (HUIOS) of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)*

One cannot become more a son than he is at this time since becoming a partaker of our Father’s nature through the Holy Spirit is what makes one His son. However, our Father’s expectation for us will change as we

grow in Him, and He will work in our lives to prepare us for the purpose He has for us as sons once we grow up.

After a time of being nourished by the milk of His word, God begins to exercise a regimen of discipline in the lives of His sons. Sonship involves discipline! This serves to develop our obedience to His will. As we respond to Him, we will become more apparent as sons of God since we will exhibit more of the nature and purpose of our Father, and less of going our own way.

This discipline can take many forms: teaching, corrective input from leaders, counsel and admonition from other believers, circumstances, problems and difficult relationships. These things serve to point out weaknesses and character flaws, that perhaps we were not even aware of. The fruit of discipline is that we become conscious of how deficient we are of spiritual fruit. Lack of humility is a most common discovery. The issue is, we must change.

*. . . My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and **He scourges every son whom He receives**. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline: But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but **He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness**. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:5-11)*

God's discipline is a distinct mark of sonship; furthermore it *never* comes to an end in this life. It is something we will experience, and hopefully do so joyfully, until we go to be with Him. The Lord's dealings will vary with each one; for only He knows what He has called us to be and do, and what is lacking in each life.

*And we know that God **causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

We must *never* compare our cross with that of other believers; to do so would be to make God appear unfair or partial. We have all observed examples of extreme hardship, persecution, trials or calamities that others have experienced and we have marveled at how their testimonies of victory glorified the Lord. He will *not* allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to stand, and He will *always* provide grace to walk through the time of difficulty we face. We need to remember that He is not testing some strategy, or the devil, or the world; it is we who are being tested. If we fail the first time, there will surely come a second time, and a third time, etc. The Lord is patient with us, but He is determined to strip away all confidence we have in our human strength, until we rely only upon Him. He is determined to destroy the works of our flesh until only His will is operative in our life.

Sonship also involves suffering! We know Jesus suffered, and that He was made perfect through His suffering. However, we draw back from the thought that perhaps our Father would also take us through suffering in order to make us more like Jesus.

*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (Philippians 1:29)*

*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. (1 Peter 2:21)*

Our Father's *expectation* for us as His sons is that we walk in the Spirit, and like Jesus, become a bondservant committed to His purpose for our generation. In this way, we prepare ourselves for a future inheritance in glory that we will share as heirs with Jesus for all eternity. This will not come to pass through any measure of human strategy or strength, but only as we yield ourselves to Him and to what He brings into our lives. There is something wrong with a church that is comfortable and at ease in the world. Persecutions and sufferings cause, believers to more clearly recognize their relationship as sons, and to do the work of sons; which is to destroy the forces of wickedness, to minister to the poor and needy and to serve God's people. Maturity comes through discipline and suffering.

***For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a **spirit of adoption** as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and **fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*****  
**(Romans 8:14-17)**

Notice three key words: **heir**, **suffer** and **glory**; these are three ingredients of sonship: the *start*, the *path* and the *goal*.

The discipline of the Lord and sufferings are not two different things; they are two aspects of the process by which one grows up as a son. Those who endure and overcome in the Lord's school of training will become more like Jesus. Discipline can be thought of as the first

mark of sonship; those who do not embrace discipline will find it most difficult to see their Father's hand in the sufferings they encounter.

*For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. (2 Corinthians 1:5-6)*

We are called to walk in relationship with our Father in heaven just as Jesus did. Some will have the privilege to enter into His sufferings far more than will others. In all of this, the objective is to know Him, to become more like Him, and to share His burden for the church and for the lost.

*So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction . . . (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4)*

*And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)*

*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary light affliction is producing for us an **eternal weight of glory** far beyond all comparison. (2 Corinthians 4:17)*

Today, as we embrace discipline and sufferings we are being prepared for the future when we will experience full adoption. This will not take place until we receive new, glorified bodies at the return of Jesus.

The word “adoption” comes from the Greek word “HUIOTHESIA,” which means “to place a son.” It has nothing to do with the legal process in western culture of adopting a child into a family. It refers to the Hebrew custom of officially recognizing a male child as a son when he is of age. He is placed as a son so that the honor and dignity of the father-son relationship will be recognized by all. That is our Father’s final expectation of us; that we attain to a maturity with all the glory and honor He has intended that we share as sons with Jesus.

When Adam sinned he entered into a state of death. He could no longer sustain his life in the world he had ruled over, for it was perfect and without death. For this reason, God reached out and touched creation, subjecting it to corruption so that Adam and his survivors would be compatible with their environment. Since that day, creation has eagerly longed for a return of righteous oversight. Man has progressively corrupted the earth with wars, pollution, destruction of natural resources including water and ecological life. Because of the hand of man, there exists crises both in the earth and in the church; in the natural and spiritual worlds. However, that is going to change!

The Lord’s remedy for creation and His people lies in the coming great visitation of His Spirit. He is restoring the church. He is going to gather in a mighty harvest of souls reclaiming them from the hand of Satan. The power of the devil over the lives of the saints will be broken. The glory of God will rest upon the church; finally, and judgment of the world will close this age. At that time there will be an unveiling of His sons in their glorified bodies. Among these sons will be those who have prepared themselves to rule and reign with Him from the city and place of His eternal rest. The placing of His sons to this end is what creation is longing for. It is what they have prepared themselves for; and it has been the expectation of their Father!

*For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility (i.e. emptiness, worthlessness) not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves having the first fruits of the Spirit even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our body.**” (Romans 8:18-23)*

*. . . for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we **endure**, we shall also **reign with Him** . . . (2 Timothy 2:11-12)*

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, the question arises, “how can we view our stature in the context of spiritual growth?” At all times, we are to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus. He is the *only* standard of excellence we have.

However, as one grows spiritually it will appear that the difference between the Lord and ourselves only increases; He becomes much greater in our eyes, while our own unworthiness also grows. Somehow, we need greater insight if we are to monitor our growth in Christ.

It is obvious that we cannot measure progress by comparing ourselves to other Christians (2 Corinthians 10:12). Furthermore, it could be misleading if we attempted to relate our growth to how many scriptures we have memorized or by certain spiritual experiences we have had.

I suggest that the mirror God gives us in His word is sufficient. If we will periodically and honestly review scriptures related to the five words of the mirror, we can recognize where we have obtained victory, and we will discover new areas that need to be dealt with. The important thing is to change!

How a father expresses his expectations for and to a son will change over the years as the child grows up. The son will have a much greater appreciation of his father's will and plan for his life when he is a teenager than when he was six years of age.

So it is with our heavenly Father. If all we know of His will for us is that we are expected to go to heaven when we die, then we have not grown spiritually. God has a plan for each one of His children; we are special in His eyes. He has a unique place for each of us in His body. It is a sign of maturity to know and be committed to the purpose of God in our generation. He is raising up an army of sons to complete the purpose He began even before the creation of the world (Isaiah 46:9-10). Through discipline, sufferings, trials and testings He is preparing them to rule and reign with Him in glory. This is His expectations for us!



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