

BACK TO THE BEGINNING  
THREE BASIC LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In I John 2:12-14, John lists the three basic levels of spiritual growth. In verse 12 John has all believers in mind: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” The phrase “little children” has nothing to do with age. The phrase refers to all believers in general.

However, in verses 13-14 John uses different terms, dividing the children of God into three categories: fathers, young men, and little children (not the same little children mentioned in verse 12). We will look at each one of these categories in a reverse order. We will do this because it will help you see in these three categories, three levels of growth.

The last phrase in verse 13 says, “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.” This is level one in the process of growth. This is where every believer starts his journey. Little children have a lot of zeal, but this unguided zeal will not produce growth. They need more than zeal – they need to be grounded in the Word of God. That’s why when you lead someone to Christ, the first thing you need to do is get them in church and get them grounded in the fundamentals of the faith. Little children must have the Word of God in order to grow properly.

The middle phrase in verse 13 says, “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” This is level two in the process of growth. Little children do not have the Word of God abiding in them strongly – they know only the basics. Consequently, they can be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). But the “young men” are not like the little children – they are strong in the Word of God. And because they are strong in the Word of God, they “have overcome the wicked one.” Satan is the master of deception. He is a liar (John 8:44), and appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), he is the master of false religion. But a spiritual young man understands doctrine and is not victimized by false religion.

Now that brings us to the last level of spiritual growth. The level that John describes in the first phrase of verse 13: “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning.” If you read carefully verses 13 and 14 you will see no other wording as strong as the wording is to the “fathers.”

These are spiritually mature people. They have progressed from knowing that they are a Christian to knowing the Word of God to knowing God Himself. They spend their life on nurturing their relationship with God. They see themselves as they really are – they do not overrate themselves. But when they focus upon God, they see Him as glorious and absolutely holy. They walk with God.

One writer said, “As you focus on the glory of God and begin to honor Him, you will find yourself being changed into His very image as you grow from one level of glory to the next. That is spiritual growth.”

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