

So far in this series of letters, we have examined how the writers of the New Testament used specific words to describe spiritual development. There is a very natural six-stage progression hidden within the Greek vocabulary itself that moves from *newborn* (*ἀρτιγέννητος* – *artigennétos*) all the way to *father* (*πατήρ* – *patēr*), forming one of the clearest discipleship progressions in the New Testament. The epistles of *Peter, Paul, and John*, along with the book of *Hebrews* each follow this progression in their own unique ways, and each writer clearly expresses the imperative of spiritual development for the serious follower of Christ.

Let us now move on to the next phase—the formidable teenage years described by *Strong's 5043* – *τέκνον* (*teknon*). Anyone who has raised a teenager understands how critical this stage can be. Many things can go right, and many things can go very wrong. One unique thing that becomes evident during this phase of development is that what has been accomplished in the earlier years—whether good or bad—begins to bear fruit here.

We must understand that there is tremendous vulnerability in this stage. As we develop, we can begin to think we are more mature than we truly are, and the enemy will use this to puff us up beyond where we should be and draw us away from the truth. Paul dealt with this very issue in his letters to the Corinthians. As mentioned earlier, this is why he stated in **1 Corinthians 3:1** “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to *babes* (*nēpios*) in Christ.”

Consider what he says as these letters develop to the Corinthian church in **2 Corinthians 12:19–21**:

- 19** Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.
- 20** For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.
- 21** I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery in which they have indulged.

We can see clearly here how Paul expresses his paternal care for the Corinthians. In **1 Corinthians 4:15** he writes, “For in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Now, in the verses quoted above from **2 Corinthians**, we see the concern of a caring father who is troubled by their behavior while he is absent.

A teenager in natural development—much like the Corinthian church in this example—is usually given a greater level of independence from their parents. Think back to what we mentioned in the previous stage, where a child is playing at the park and the parent keeps them within eyesight. In the teenage years, however, we may allow them to go to the park on their own as we begin trusting them with more independent responsibilities.

Here lies the dilemma. Some, when given greater responsibility and independence, make wise choices—while others do not. Peer relationships and associations become very important during these years. The desire to fit in, to be popular, and simply to be accepted can become such a strong driving

force that compromises are easily made. Because they are moving toward independence and wanting to engage in adult-type activities without yet carrying the full responsibilities of adulthood, teenagers can often become critical of authority and begin to resent the boundaries set by their parents. Their emotions are still developing, and while they may think they are ready, they often are not. Unfortunately, at this stage they may resist sound advice and wisdom, making them susceptible to the influence of the enemy.

When a believer enters the **teknon** stage spiritually, he may feel ready to lead—but in reality he is not yet prepared. Believers at this stage still need to remain under tutors and governors, just as teenagers remain under the guidance of their parents. Christians at this stage often desire to spread their wings and do something for God. They may not want to hear as much about accountability or responsibility, and they may pursue ministry opportunities more eagerly than the character development required to carry the calling God is placing upon their lives.

At this point it is helpful to remember the witness of Jesus Himself. Think about the gospel accounts and what is recorded for us regarding these formative years. You might ask, “What do the Gospels say about Jesus’ teenage years?” In truth, very little is recorded. However, we do have a passage that reveals how Jesus approached these years from the very beginning. Consider what **Luke 2:51-52** records regarding Jesus’ attitude toward His earthly parents:

**51** Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.

**52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Just before this moment, Jesus had said to Joseph and Mary—who had been frantically searching for Him after losing sight of Him—“Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” Yet this same Jesus, the Word made flesh, God incarnate, still submitted Himself to His parents and “was subject to them.”

Can you see the profound example this provides as we consider our own spiritual development? The Gospel records Jesus at twelve years of age, and then the narrative does not pick up again until He is around thirty years old. Consider what Jesus continued to develop within Himself through His humanity during those years. Likewise, what do we need to develop in order to fully step into our purposes and callings?

Is it possible that God desires for us also to be “subject to them”? We must understand that knowledge must be transformed into wisdom and understanding. It cannot remain merely natural wisdom or intellectual knowledge; it must become godly wisdom and settle within the heart. **Godly wisdom develops through obedience to His Word; and the fact is, obedience and experience take time. There is simply no substitute for this process.**

When God called me to the pastorate in 1983, He placed a mandate upon me that remains to this day: **Train, Stabilize, and Mature My people.** These three words express the heart and soul of what I have spent years studying in the Word to teach within my local church, and to the degree that I have influence, beyond it. You can see how what I have written so far in this series follows this mandate.

I would like to share something from our church’s vision statement that speaks directly to the stage we are discussing and what we hope to see developed as the transition is made from the **teknon** stage:

As Christians, when we are stabilized in our walk with God, we have consistent fellowship with Christ, which translates into effective fellowship with others. Stable

Christians take responsibility and are dependable in the work of the ministry and in the daily interactions of life, including family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and the body of Christ. At this stage of development the believer presses in to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit more clearly. Because the voice of the Holy Spirit can be distinguished, we become a people who are not easily moved away from the foundation of the Word of God. We become “a house built upon the rock” of Christ.

**(Matthew 7:24–25)**

Can you imagine how Jesus Himself approached His teenage years? How He could submit Himself to the natural authority in His life while remaining in constant fellowship with His heavenly Father. How He humbled Himself and worked as a carpenter, all the while preparing Himself for the purposes and plans that had been established in the Godhead before the foundation of the world.

The possibilities of moving from childhood training into stabilization depend greatly upon our willingness to be subject to godly authority in our lives and to maintain fellowship with the Holy Spirit through the Word of God on a continual basis.

Consider again what Paul was addressing with the Corinthians. Although they should have matured, his concern—based on what had been reported to him—was that they had not yet done so. **His evaluation was not based on their natural résumés or their natural age, but on their fruit.** This is exactly what we must examine when assessing our own spiritual development: our fruit and our faithfulness over time.

Have a blessed month,

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