Marks of A Growing Christian
Ephesians 4:11-32

(Our scripture text this morning/evening is taken from the fourth chapter of the Book of Ephesians. We will be looking at a great deal of this chapter throughout the message, but for now let’s just read verses 11-13.)

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

12 to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

( Ephesians 4:11-13 New International Version)

PRAYER

Introduction

ILLUSTRATION: Back in the mid-70’s while I was still a student at Johnson Bible College, I got the opportunity to go to Disney World, just a few short years after that amusement park opened.

While some of my buddies and I were waiting to get on one of the rides, we heard this unruly child throwing an awful hissy behind us. The boy’s dad was doing everything he could to calm the boy down.
The dad said, “I’ll get you some cotton candy if you’ll be quiet.”
The little brat…..uh, I mean, “little angel” said, “I don’t want any cotton candy.”

The dad said, “Well how about some ice cream?”
The little boy screamed, “I don’t want ice cream!”

It was apparent to everyone around that the little monster……
I mean, little angel, had the upper hand on his helpless dad.

Finally the exasperated dad shouted…..”I JUST WISH YOU WOULD GROW UP!”

Well temptation got the best of me and I just had to turn around and look. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw this frustrated dad standing there wearing a Mickey Mouse beanie on his head and a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt.

Somehow I don’t think the words “grow up” carried a whole lot of weight with the little boy.

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As GOD’S CHILDREN, we must understand that our Heavenly Father wants us to “GROW UP” spiritually.

Just as any parent is delighted when they see their children grow and mature, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER is delighted when He sees you and me GROW from immature “spiritual infants” into mature “spiritual adults.”

And Paul reminds us in verse 13, that it is God’s desire that ALL, not some, but ALL OF US “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Christian, are you growing?
If you are….how much have you grown?
If you’re not…..why not?
ILLUSTRATION: When our grandsons, Zack and Isaac were younger, Linda used to keep a growth chart on the door facing inside her bathroom. She would have Zack and Isaac stand up real straight and tall with their back pressed up against that chart and she would make a mark even with the top of their heads and write their names beside the mark.

Several months would go by and Linda would take another measurement to see if the boys had grown any since the previous measurement. And whether it was an inch or just a fraction of an inch, Zack and Isaac were excited to see how much they had grown.

This morning/evening, let’s think of EPHESIANS chapter 4 as a “Spiritual Growth Chart.” In this fourth chapter we are going to look at THREE MARKS OF A GROWING CHRISTIAN.

And as we look at each of these marks, I hope each of you will measure yourself to see just where you are in your own spiritual growth.

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Our first MARK on this “spiritual growth chart” is found in verses 14-16 and that is…….

I. A Growing Christian Is Marked By Steadfastness  verses 14-16

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ.

16 From him the whole body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
1. In these three verses, Paul points out three areas where a growing Christian demonstrates a STEADFASTNESS.

(A) A GROWING CHRISTIAN IS STEADFAST IN HIS DOCTRINE verse 14

We live in a world filled with false teachings, lies, and deceptive philosophies. Paul compares these false teachings to “waves tossing back and forth all around us.” The only way that you and I as Christians can keep from being “swept away” by the waves of false teaching is to have our lives firmly anchored in the Word of God.

One way you can tell you have grown and are growing spiritually is when you are steadfast and immoveable in your doctrinal beliefs.

A growing Christian is a student of God’s Word. A growing Christian knows what he or she believes and those beliefs are based on the truths found in God’s Word, not on man’s opinions or one’s personal experiences.

A growing Christian refuses to COMPROMISE his or her doctrinal beliefs, even if it means standing alone on the word of God!

Jesus said in JOHN 8:31,32 “If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Christian, how about you? Do you know what you believe and why you believe it? Do you spend time in God’s Word each day? Are you confident you can recognize false teaching when you hear it and not be led astray?

Yes, A Growing Christian is steadfast in his DOCTRINE
(B) A GROWING CHRISTIAN IS ALSO STEADFAST IN HIS DEVELOPMENT  verse 15

Do you remember when your kids went through “growth spurts?” For the longest time it appeared they weren’t growing at all, then all the sudden they shot up about 4-6 inches in a short period of time. Then they stopped growing again.

Over the years I have observed how some Christians go through “growth spurts.” They’re real actively involved in the church for awhile. And they’re in church every Sunday……then all the sudden they “fall off the radar screen” and you don’t seem them again for several months. Then one Sunday they show up for church “out of the blue” as though they never left.

We must all understand that one cannot experience consistent, lasting spiritual growth if he or she approaches the Christian life as though it is a “revolving door” where one comes and goes as he pleases.

I have learned that a true mark of a growing christian is that there is a STEADFASTNESS in their development. Little by little, day by day, they steadily “grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

A growing christian is STEADFAST in his DOCTRINE. A growing christian is STEADFAST in his DEVELOPMENT

(C) AND A GROWING CHRISTIAN IS ALSO STEADFAST IN HIS DEVOTION  verse 16

In verse 16, Paul talks about how the growing christian finds his or her place in the body of Christ, the Church, and devotes himself to doing his or her part to see that the church is built up in love.

The growing christian is not focused on what is good for ME, MYSELF and I……but rather on what is best for the whole church family.
The growing christian does not seek personal credit and recognition for everything he or she does in the church, but seeks rather to give Christ the honor and glory He alone deserves.

The growing christian does not seek to “exalt himself or herself” but seeks to exalt Jesus Christ.

The growing christian doesn’t seek his or her will for the church, but seeks the will of Christ for the church.

**So here is our FIRST mark of spiritual growth….**

A Growing Christian is marked by **Steadfastness**

Steadfastness in his **doctrine**, in his **development** and in his **devotion**.

Christian, how is your STEADFASTNESS?

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But a growing christian is not only marked by steadfastness……..

II. A Growing Christian Is Marked By **Holiness**

Verses 17-24

**ILLUSTRATION:** I remember reading a story several years ago about a cowardly Civil War soldier who didn’t want to be identified with either the Union or the Confederate Army.

To conceal his allegiance, he wore a Union Army jacket and Confederate army pants and cap. Well one day in a battle between Union and Confederate troops, the cowardly soldier wound up getting shot by both sides.
1. You know I believe there are a lot of Christians who are just like that cowardly Civil War soldier. On Sunday they dress up in their nice Sunday best and look like a Christian.

   But then Monday morning through Saturday they dress up in their “old sinful ways” so no one would ever know they are a Christian.

2. One of the sure marks that you have grown and are growing as a Christian is when your life is characterized by a consistent HOLINESS, no matter what day of the week it may be.

3. Back in the 1970’s there was a popular slogan commonly heard in Christian circles. It went like this, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Just something to think about.

4. Paul tells us in verses 22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

   ILLUSTRATION: The ancient Romans were notorious for their hideous, inhumane executions. Of course we see just one example of that in the Crucifixion of Jesus.

   But the Romans often used another form of execution that was hideously grotesque. They would chain the corpse of a dead man to the back of a man sentenced to die. Day and night, night and day the convicted man remained attached to the corpse.
As that corpse began to decay, awful sores and bacteria born diseases would infect the condemned man until he began to look so much like the corpse it was difficult to tell which was which. Of course he would eventually die.

5. The day you and I accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, two things were to have happened:

One, our old sinful man was to have been put to death, and Two, our new spiritual self was born.

Tragically, many who claim to be Christians never buried their old sinful self. They are still carrying around the old sinful corpse of the man or woman they used to be and it is hard to distinguish between the old man and the new man.

6. Brothers and sisters you will never GROW as a Christian as long as you are still carrying around the old sinful you!

A Growing Christian is Marked By Steadfastness
A Growing Christian is Marked By Holiness

Now let’s look at our third and final mark on our “spiritual growth chart” and that is........
III. A Growing Christian Is Marked By Christlikeness  verses 30-32

ILLUSTRATION: When you were a kid, did you know someone you looked up to and admired so much you wanted to grow up and become just like them?

When I was a boy I wanted to grow up and become just like Rick Mount. Now unless you’re from Indiana or have been a life-long basketball fan, you probably have never heard of Rick Mount.

Rick Mount was a star basketball player at Lebanon High School in Lebanon, Indiana. He was the first High School athlete to have his picture placed on the cover of Sport’s Illustrated Magazine. Rick Mount was named Indiana’s “Mr. Basketball” his senior year.

He went on to become an all-American at Purdue University. During his senior year at Purdue, Rick Mount averaged 39 points per game, second only to Pistol Pete Marveich’s 42 points per game. Also his senior year he led the Purdue Boilermakers to the National Championship game where they lost to Marquette.

I literally ate, drank and slept Rick Mount as a boy. When I would shoot basketball beside my house I would pretend I was Rick Mount. In basketball practice at school I would always shoot shots from deep in the corner just like Rick Mount. I even asked the coach if I could wear Number 10, because that was Rick Mount’s number. I wanted to grow up and become just like Rick.
1. As Christians you and I should want to “grow up” and become “just like Jesus.”

And one of the surest marks that you and I have grown spiritually is when others can look at us and see a Christlikeness.

2. When you and I grow spiritually, there will be a Christlikeness in how we ACT.....how we REACT.....and how we INTERACT.

3. We see all three of these things in verses 30-32.

Vs. 30 One evidence you are growing spiritually is when there is a CHRISTLIKENESS in how you ACT. A growing Christian will not deliberately do things he knows will grieve the Holy Spirit. Its true! Christians ought to ACT like CHRISTIANS!

Vs. 31 If you are growing spiritually you will demonstrate a CHRISTLIKENESS in the way you REACT, especially when someone has wronged you or sinned against you. Christ never became bitter......and he never went into a fit of angry rage against those who wronged him. Nor did he ever get into a physical brawl or go out an slander the name of the person who wronged him. Neither should we REACT in any of those ways.

Vs. 32 If you are growing spiritually, you will demonstrate a CHRISTLIKENESS in how you INTERACT. Christ had such a KIND, COMPASSIONATE, FORGIVING SPIRIT even an adulterous woman and a cheating tax collector found comfort in his presence.

It has been said “Never is one more like Jesus Christ than when he or she is willing to FORGIVE.”

Your willingness to forgive someone who has wronged you or sinned against you is a testimony to the DEPTH of your CHRIST-LIKENESS.
CONCLUSION

On a wall near the main entrance to the ALAMO in San Antonio, Texas, is a portrait with the following inscription:

“James Butler Bonham---no picture of him exists. This portrait is of his nephew, Major James Bonham, deceased, who greatly resembled his uncle. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom.”

Christians, our greatest desire, our greatest aim in life should be to become so Christ-like that others come to know the appearance of the MAN who died for the FREEDOM of all mankind on the cross of Calvary.

There are no shortcuts to spiritual growth!
It requires that we live a LIFE OF STEADFASTNESS…..A LIFE OF HOLINESS and A LIFE OF CHRISTLIKENESS……one moment at a time……one hour at a time……one day at a time until we go to be with the LORD for all eternity.

One day you and I are going to stand before our Heavenly Father. May He say to each and everyone of us that day.....”My, my how you’ve grown!”