

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG106 – Grow Up Into Christ

I am titling this podcast, *Grow Up Into Christ*. I am using this time to discuss something that I think is a concern for us as Christians. In Christianity, we follow a perfect Savior that lived a human life. Christ became the standard for all believers; and that is really a good thing, as long as following up with that concept, there is teaching that creates an understanding and grace for the process of our perfection into His likeness. Yeshua did not come into the flesh, born of a woman, as a perfect human. He took on flesh, and had to learn obedience to the Father, and He was made perfect through discipline. He cried out to God, who was able to save Him, just as we need salvation; and He became a Son that was and is well-pleasing to the Father. He is the pattern for us to live our lives by, and we must follow His example – not only as a perfect life, but also in His growing into that perfection and that relationship with the Father that we know He had.

What I am discussing here is the fact that many times, I think doctrine can be developed, or concepts can be promoted, that bring people under condemnation; because once they have a salvation experience, they are not instantly perfect. As we go along, even in our relationship with the Lord as Christians, we find that we make mistakes, that we fall on our face, that we have problems; and those can be serious problems at times. Yet, there cannot be a condemnation that comes along because, “Christ was perfect, you have to be perfect” – and if you are not instantly perfect, or if you do not obtain perfection even after years of following Christ as your Savior, there is a feeling of failure that you can come into. I think this is something, honestly, that we have to be very careful about, because I believe that the purpose of Christ is that we grow into His image, into His likeness. We follow a pattern. Yes, He was perfect; and many times, it is not always that evident when we read the Gospels, or read the Biblical stories, how He became perfect. Sometimes I think we skip over it. Other times I think it is something that is not really emphasized that much in church teaching or in Bible teaching. So I want to touch on this, and I hope it is freeing. It is not that we believe in what is called “greasy grace,” or just, “you can live any way and don’t worry about it; if you have problems, that is not a problem.” No, we are to become like Him. He is our pattern. He is the One that we follow and look to become like. He is the firstborn among many brethren. And so, we do want to be constantly growing into His image, and becoming more and more like Him.

There is a drive within us to move into perfection. And it is out of the mouth of Christ Himself, Yeshua, in the Gospels, that we get this idea that we are to be perfect. In Matthew 5:43-48, He is teaching and says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” So it is Christ who brings this idea out in His teaching that as believers, as followers, we are to press towards, and attain, hopefully, into this state of being perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect.

It certainly is set before us by the Lord as a goal. So it is true that we should have this drive and this faith in our hearts to move constantly into a more perfected state of being like Christ, as He was in the earth. But again, I think understanding how that works, and what it means to be perfect, or to become perfect, is important for us – lest we fall into condemnation, lest there come this thing arising in us of feeling like a failure. We live knowing that the wicked one is always condemning; satan is the condemner of the brethren, and he is always bringing condemnation to us as we are trying to walk with God. Therefore, our understanding needs to be correct in order not to fall into condemnation, in order not to feel that we failed when we make a mistake or do things wrong.

I want to look first at some of the figures in the Hebrew Scriptures. I know of a Jewish teacher one time that said, “It is difficult to be a Christian, because they follow this perfect person and they have this knowledge of his perfection, and therefore everyone is to be perfect. And if you are not perfect, then you are failing.” He went on to state that in Judaism it is a lot better, because they have all of these figures that are the ones that they look to as teachers and leaders, and the Scriptures very much show their imperfections; and so they do not have this comparison that they are always up against. Well, I want us to remember, as believers, that the Hebrew Scriptures are part of our Bible, and these figures of the Hebrew Scriptures are our figures also; they are our Biblical heroes and examples that we follow. And I agree, the Scripture is very clear about the problems that humans have on many, many levels. And the Hebrew Scriptures are not shy at all about pointing out the needs and the problems and the downfallings and the failures of these wonderful men and women of God that had some true problems. You see it across all of these figures – whether it be Moses, or David, or whoever you want to look at, they all had problems. And yet, at the same time, those problems are not brought up as a put down. They are brought up, I think, for our example, to recognize, yes, they too were human. They too were men and women who were seeking to the best of their ability to follow after a purity, a righteousness, and to move into a perfect life that the Scripture talks about.

One of the great figures, of course, is Abraham. Abraham was the friend of God. In the book of James, at chapter 2, verses 20-22, it says, “But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.” So there was a perfection that he achieved in his faith through the works that he performed. Verses 23-24, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” So this is a great example, because here Abraham is referred to, and we know Abraham this way – “he is the friend of God.” We know that Abraham did take his son, at the direction of God, and was prepared to sacrifice Isaac at the binding on Mount Moriah; and the Lord, of course, stopped that from happening. But I also want us to remember that it says, “God reckoned him righteous.” And whatever we think about righteousness or perfection, it is not going to be something that we achieve in all of our works – even though here, this Scripture is talking about our works, and how works are necessary if faith is to be perfected. Yet perfection itself is something that is attributed to us by God, because only God is perfect; and even when Yeshua is teaching that we should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, it brings us to this place where God Himself is the One who imparts this perfection to us. It is not something we gain on our own, even though we find this process of our faith being perfected through the works of obedience that we engage in.

So here is Abraham, the friend of God, the one who was reckoned righteous by God; and yet, if we would go through the life of Abraham, we find many problems that he had. He lied about Sarah, his

wife, being his sister. And she was his half-sister, so maybe you could say it was a half-lie – but let's not go there, right? A lie is a lie, and Abraham was trying to save himself by portraying her as his sister. And what was that an expression of? A lack of faith. A lack of faith that God could save him and protect him in those circumstances he found himself in. So again, we look at Abraham, this tremendous figure, who had his faith perfected – but remember, his faith was perfected. It was perfected in this process of his walk with God, in his relationship with the Lord and the things the Lord directed him and took him through. So we could say he was made perfect, and that is a beautiful example.

I will give us one more example. And again, you can go through the Scriptures yourself to almost every hero that we have in the Scriptures, and we find both their faith being honored, their works, their lives being honored by the Scriptures, but without any hesitation to show forth their problems and their downfallings and the needs that they had on a human level. In Acts 13:22-23, it says, “After He had removed him,” this was speaking about God removing the King of Israel because of his failures, “He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’ From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus.” This is a tremendous one, because we also know that David is called “a man after God's own heart.” We know that David was brought forth to replace the previous king, Saul, who failed in his rebellion against the Lord; and it was said of David that “he will do all My will.” And yet when we look at the stories of David, we see many failings of David, which included adultery, included murder, you know, terrible things. And yet, David was still known as a man after God's own heart, because God did not hit the total button after these events in David's life. In these problems, in these failings, God continued to work with and through David, and He brought forth the line of Jesus, Yeshua, the Savior, out of the line of David. And so He kept working with him, and David, yes, truly was, and did become, a man after God's own heart. It was something, again, attributed to God. It was brought forth by God in His dealings with David in his life, through the circumstances He took him through and the corrections that He brought upon him; because He definitely disciplined David for his mistakes and for his sin. So this is a part of it: God does bring discipline. He did this with Jesus, with Yeshua, and we see that about Him. And remember, we are walking with a Man who was perfect in the flesh; but we cannot forget that Jesus was made perfect, Yeshua was made perfect in His walk in the days of His flesh.

Let's look at some of these verses. Hebrews 5:7-10 says, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety,” or His reverence. “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” And I think this applies to us. Although we are sons, children of God, we learn obedience from the things which we go through. God brings circumstances and events into our lives that we must walk through, and in that process, we will be perfected by Him. Verses 8-10, again, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” So we see this: Yes, Christ was perfect. Yes, He is our example that we are to follow. But He was not brought into the earth, born of a woman, in perfection. If He was, it takes away from the whole reality that He came in flesh so that we could win this war that we live in the flesh, in our striving to become perfect and walk with the Father as sons pleasing to Him, as was Christ. The Father said of Him, “This is My Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” Those are the words we long to hear. And we will hear those words, but we will be brought to that place of being pleasing to Him. Right now, maybe everything you are doing is not pleasing to Him, but do not

be condemned over it. Get up, and keep walking. Go into repentance over your downfallings, your mistakes and your failures; but repent with faith, knowing that Christ Himself was made perfect. He learned obedience, and you will become pleasing to the Father and pleasing to the Lord in the same way. So we throw off all condemnation that comes to make us stop or make us feel as though we are a failure.

In Hebrews 2, verses 9-11, “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” How did He achieve this? By the grace of God. “For it was fitting for Him” – for Christ – “for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” God found it fitting to bring Christ through these events so that He would be perfected in order to bring many sons into perfection. God authors this perfection through Christ, who in a sense becomes our author by having suffered and being made perfect. Verse 11, “For both He who sanctifies” – which is Christ, “and those who are sanctified” – which is us, “are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” So we follow Christ. We do follow Him, but we must remember, He became perfect. He was made perfect. He learned obedience, He suffered, in order to become. He was disciplined by the Father, and the Father perfected Him, in order that He would become our perfection. So the Father is fathering you in a relationship with Him – and we must remember, that is what our life, in this life, is all about. It is about a relationship with the Father, through Christ, Christ who is the firstborn among many sons; and we are likewise being created into sons pleasing to the Father.

Philippians 2:12-13 says, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” We have to remember that it is God who is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. What is His pleasure? Our perfection, our coming into the likeness of the Son. But it is He who is working it in us – it is not something we achieve on our own by the flesh.

Hebrews 13:20-21 says, “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” This is something that God is working in us; again, He worked it in Christ, and He is working it in you. We have to understand our salvation as a long-term project. We have to understand our salvation as a process of perfection, as a process of being pleasing in His sight and becoming transformed into the image of Christ. He is going to equip you in every good thing to do His will, and He is going to work in us that which is pleasing in His sight. It does not happen overnight. It is not something that is a flash like when we are first saved, and brought into a relationship of salvation through Christ with the Father. It is something that begins at that point, and from that point, it is being worked in us.

Hebrews 12, starting at verses 4-5, goes on to say, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him.’” When we find ourselves being disciplined, do not faint. Do not give up. Do not quit. Do not say, “I can

never make it. I cannot do it. I failed again, this is hard.” Yes, it is difficult, but do not faint when you are reproved by Him. Take it, repent over it, and by faith walk on in that correction.

Verses 6-7, “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?” In other words, we should not think this is a strange thing, or that it should not require this type of relationship with the Lord in order to have this walk with Him that brings us into perfection, or Christ's likeness. This should be seen as normal. We should understand it as part of the process, and not be condemned over it, or defeated by it. We should be strengthened by it and walk in it, by faith.

Verse 8 says, “But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Who is he talking about, “all become partakers”? Well, let's go back to those Hebrew Scriptures – all of those saints that we look at and we think, “Wow! What tremendous works they did. What tremendous walks with God they had.” No, they all became partakers through this discipline that they received, because He was, likewise, their Father, and they were sons to Him. So do not be condemned that you are not perfect. You may not be perfect at this point; yet we must remember, in Christ we are to grow up into His likeness. We are not to be in some instant-perfected state as we are saved; we grow up into His image.

Let's look at just a few more Scriptures. Second Peter 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” Remember, He will always get the glory, because it is always Him who is working it in you. But it tells us to grow up in grace, grow up in the knowledge of Him. First Peter 2:1-2 says, “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” We are to grow in respect to our salvation. It is not a defeat that we must grow up. And what do we find when we are in the process of growing? We find that there is immaturity. So we look to grow into maturity; and it will happen, as we see Him as a loving Father, walking us into that relationship.

Ephesians 4:15-16, “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” The whole body of Christ is to be experiencing this process of growing up in all aspects into Him – all aspects. We are to be perfect. But we achieve that not by ourselves, by trying to be perfect; we grow up in Him into that perfection. Like Abraham, it is attributed to us. It is imparted, imputed to us, that perfection and that righteousness.

I want to end with just these quick points. Christian thinking has a tendency to emphasize the need for perfection from every believer, and that can bring a condemnation. The Word does say to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect; but we must remember that the Scripture also shows imperfect humans that are being made perfect while in this process of a walk with the Lord, and in a true relationship with Him. And so I bless your relationship with Him, your walk with the Lord, that He discipline you, that He guide you, that He perfect that which concerns you, in the name of the Lord. Amen.