

FOUR LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1 John 2:12-14

¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

INTRODUCTION

God's will for every believer is growth. Paul declared, "...**we are no longer to be children** (neophytes), tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up** in all aspects into Him..." (Eph. 4:14,15). Peter admonished his readers, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Pe. 3:18). Earlier he declared "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow" (2Pe. 2:2). The writer to the Hebrews rebuked his readers for their immaturity. He wrote:

Heb. 5:12-1 (NASB) ¹²For 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.** ¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us press on to maturity...**

While we must be ready to accept and minister to believers at all levels of spiritual growth, we should be seeking to produce mature believers, not just comfortable saints. In this parenthetical statement, John addresses this issue of spiritual growth by identifying four levels of spiritual growth.

THE INFANT - The second term for *children* is *paidion* (v.13) and it refers to a newborn child, infant or babe. When used figuratively, it refers to an undeveloped understanding or a childish person.

THE TODDLER - The first term for *children* used by John is *teknia* (v.12) and in our English text it is translated "little children." While the term is often used as a term of endearment, it is also used in a literal sense to describe an infant or small child or toddler. Conceptually, it speaks of new converts or babes in Christ.

THE YOUNG MEN - The third level mentioned by John is *neaniskoi* or *young men* (vs.13, 14) and refers to a *young man, youth* or *a man in the prime of life*.

THE FATHERS - The fourth level mentioned by John is *pateres* or *fathers* (vs. 13, 14) and refers to *a father, an elder, senior* or *mature one*. Vine says that *pater* is from a root signifying a *nourisher, protector* or *upholder*.

It is from John's use of these four terms that I draw the concept of FOUR LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH.