

It's difficult to know where to start really as there are so many things wanting to be said all at once.

But from the title it's clear that this is all about us growing spiritually in Christ, both as individuals and as the body of Christ.

Incidentally don't be put off with the word 'perfection'..., as though at the moment we aren't where we should be.... or need to try harder.

It's the word 'telios', which simply means finished and also mature..., it's the same thing ....and when it's used of us as the body of Christ.... or as individuals..., it's always in the context of growing up .

We'll see that clearly later on.

Think of the Corinthian church with all kinds of divisions and poor behaviour and how Paul described them as carnal christians at that time. They were saved but were still living after the flesh for the most part.

Also the title of the study is from Hebrews and was a similar spur for these as well, to grow up. When you read what's written there, they were still in need of milk, always hearking back for forgiveness, when it was a once for all work...all our sin was laid on him, past, present and future. Not that we are to continue in sin but if we do, to know it's covered and to move on. To walk in the truth of their new identity in Christ.

So we can be saved, made alive in our spirit..., God having placed us in Christ when we believed and were baptised..... and yet still remain as babies, long after we ought....but the call from our Father is to grow up, to grow in grace by acknowledging our true identity in Christ and to speak it out.

The apostle Paul wrote *“don't be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”*. (Romans 12:2 )

We're encouraged as well to *“behold as in a mirror the glory of The Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18), that's through the gospel. To see there, the love of God that was revealed in Him and all He's done for us.... and to understand, that as He is, so are we in this world. As we do this it goes on to say....

*“...are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

Do you see..., both those scriptures, which incidentally speak of us being transfigured through this, are saying the same thing ? Believing what God says about us.

Think about it, what do you see in a mirror ?..... Yes, exactly..., you see yourself.

He lives in us by His Spirit and we have been placed in Christ.

Paul makes it clear that the mirror spoken of here is the gospel concerning the Lord Jesus ... but when we look in a mirror, we see our own reflection. So the point is... that when we see the glory of the lord as revealed in the Word..., we are seeing who we really are. The Lord in effect saying, *“Look ! This is who you are in me...”*.

Think about it., we can't see what we're like without we look in a mirror....and the image we see in God's mirror, the gospel..., is the glory of The Lord.

*“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”* ( 1Corinthians 13:12 )

So here at the start that's what this little study is all about... growing up spiritually through beholding the glory of The Lord as revealed through the gospel.

Acknowledging our true identity in Christ.

It's a definite work of The Holy Spirit , who is enlightening the eyes of our hearts through good preaching and teaching that proclaims the Lord Jesus and all He's done for us....and of our identity in Him as members of His body.

Learning to be led of the Spirit, by His impulses rather than the drive, the strong drive of the flesh.... and so often, as we are now one spirit...., this may be a thought, a desire or prompt within, that is easily quashed thinking it's 'just me' kind of thing....but we're learning.

But it always come back to the gospel..., In Romans 1:17 Paul said that in the gospel, the Righteousness of God is being revealed, from faith to faith...and that's it., it's a progressive walk of faith, as more and more we see and appreciate, that it's all of Him and none of me.

It's not about my strengths or weaknesses ...but about **His** love...., **His** grace..., **His** faithfulness....

**His** Righteousness and what He has done for us. He dwells within and my glory, or boasting, is of His love for me.

Anyway we'll look more closely at all this later on.... but for the most part I know it's going to be an affirmation really of things we already know.... but that's a good thing.

But if you can keep in mind this idea of growing up, through the renewing of our minds by The Spirit.

Which is exactly what The Lord Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do....lead us into all the truth.

There's no way I can fit everything I want to share in one go, without sending you to sleep, so I won't do that. I think it's best if I start with the chapter in John's gospel that first grabbed my attention...

It's John 17., where the Lord Jesus, just before he was taken captive and later crucified, prayed to The Father for all those who would thereafter believe on him..... so in effect, for his church to be.....and you'll see it's all about us being made into one.

One with each other..., one in Him and in The Father.

Everything He was about to suffer and accomplish would be to this end. This Oneness....

Now we could talk for hours on this alone..... as this is God's family expanding..., The Lord Jesus not ashamed to call us brethren, scripture says.

It's something God our Father has planned .... before time began.....

And from scripture..., especially in Ephesians..., we see that this is something that pleases him so much.

Everyone can understand this emotion, this longing and joy for his children .

Anyway, I'll read the whole chapter as everything I want to share is found in here.

I underlined the parts that are especially relevant.

*John 17:1-26 NKJV*

*1. Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.*

*And **this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.***

*4. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do and now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

***I have manifested 'Your name' to the men whom You have given Me** out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.*

(Now this is a key thing I'd like to point out...., "I have manifested your name" to them....., if you could think in terms of a name revealing that person's character)

*Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. **For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them,** and have known surely that I came forth from You; and **they have believed that You sent Me.** ( this is another key issue,, receiving and believing God's word)*

9. *I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.*

14. *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*

20. *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, [are] in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (So this is what stood out to me, this is the desired end result.... that they all may be one.....and one in us )*

22. *And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (So our being perfected into one .... is linked to His glory)*

24. *Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*  
( We are one with Him,... And he wants us to behold His glory )

25. *O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me and I have declared to them 'Your name', and will declare it, 'that' the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*  
( Now this is a tremendous verse.... Filled with the love of The Father through the declaration of His name.... a name being one's nature. )

So this is all about the church, the body of Christ being perfected into one, in Him and in The Father. The implication being, that everything He was about to accomplish on our behalf, in His death and resurrection, would be to this end. *"that they all may be one, as You, Father, [are] in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us"*.

And we know that from the moment the church of Jesus Christ was born in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after His resurrection..., all of heavens resources have been invested in this., the calling and preparation of the body of Christ.

Just think of the investment that's gone into this...., God's beloved only Son Jesus, who came into the world to die for all our sins.. /... the outpouring of The Holy Spirit ... /.... God's word of life, the gospel message, that for the last 2,000 years has been proclaimed throughout the whole world and *"The Lord working with them"*

Then consider all the gifts and the ministries solely for the purpose of the building up of the church (*eklesia =called out ones*) that's a compound word *ek (out from)+kaleo (to call)*... /... then there's the angels, whose task it is to minister to these, the heirs of salvation....

.... and all the while, creation is waiting.... it's been longing and waiting for the moment when the sons of God are finally manifested when it too will be restored and set free .

So you can see Our being perfected into one is **THE** thing on God's agenda.

So we know that this is a work being carried out by The Holy Spirit and it's centred entirely on the gospel.... It's there in John 17, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one"...*,

This then is all about The love of God and his plan and purpose for our lives. It's all about His grace and His goodness....and on our part it's simply a case of receiving it with a grateful heart by faith.

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I'd like to pause here for a moment.... and just drop in a couple of things to be kept on the back burner kind of thing.

First of all..., Having believed on The Lord Jesus and been baptised, God has placed us in Christ....

That's a certainty for anyone whose believed on The Lord Jesus and asked Him into their heart.

All our sins forgiven through the blood of Jesus.... All our judgment borne by Him on the cross.

We're safe and secure in Christ....as children of God. By grace He has saved us through faith and our citizenship is in heaven.

The thing is this, *"We are in Him.(no doubt about that)...* and in Him we are being made perfect (*eis*) into one".

And that the word 'perfect'...,which means finished..., equally means mature .

So to be thinking in terms of growing up spiritually.

Anyway just to bear those things in mind as we move on.

Have a look at what Paul wrote concerning this,....

Incidentally.... regarding Paul..., the Apostle to the Gentiles.... I'm sure it's unnecessary but just in case there's any new folks.... to mention at this point, that with 2/3 rds of the New Testament consisting of his letters to various churches..., most of the references here, are from the things that he's written to the churches.

So, "Paul said this" or "that", obviously refers to him.... and bearing in mind that he said that God's hidden mystery concerning Christ had been revealed to him....and that he was to proclaim it in plain speech to the church..., then he's certainly one to listen to.

This is what he wrote to the Ephesian church.... Ephesians 4:1-16 NKJV

*"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering., bearing with one another in love..., endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

*7. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."*

*(Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

*11. And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ**...., till we all come*

*(\*eis=unto) to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.,(\*eis=unto) to a perfect man.,*

*(\*eis=unto) to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

*14. **that we should no longer be children**, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

*15. **but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

So it's The Lord who gives the increase but it's always through The Word of truth.

And the 'truth' of course, refers to the gospel in it's fulness, which Paul preached and constantly encouraged folks to believe and walk in.... our identity in Him, through the finished work of The Lord Jesus.  
The gospel.. where God's love for us was revealed in the Lord Jesus and all He's done for us....and how it is, that spiritual growth occurs when we believe with the heart and speak it out....

Preaching and teaching are of course the prime way of '*speaking the truth in love*', but then singing is a great way for us to be able to confess the truth in praise and worship to The Lord.  
Also when we pray, whether privately or together, speaking these things out to Him in thanksgiving.... and again, in conversation and fellowship with one another .  
Just endeavouring to see folks established in the truth and in the very great love of The Father.

So through the gifts and the ministries, in fact every part, the body is being built up ' in love' ..., which is the essential ingredient.... But it's through the Word of truth . "*Faith that works through love*"

Notice the context here of growing up....,  
See how Paul compares, "*children swayed with every wind of doctrine*", with....  
"but '*speaking' the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things*".

We speak... as a consequence of having first believed in our heart, while children need to be fed and nurtured with the milk of the gospel...., established in the knowledge of God's love for them, that's revealed in Jesus.

So,..... Having placed us in Christ when we believed, all the rich blessing and anointing upon The Lord Jesus our head, we partake of as well, simply because of our oneness with Him...and if we truly believe in our heart what he's done for us in love... and it is the truth after all..., then speaking these things out becomes very powerful stuff. The essential thing is that first we believe in our heart.... and then speak it out.

In our prayers, whether privately or whatever, I'm convinced that giving voice to these things in thanks to The Lord, is so beneficial , for example, from the heart something like.....  
"Dear Father, thank you for my place in Christ by your grace and for your gift of righteousness to me....thank you for your great love that will never let me go ...."  
We are giving our Father all the glory which is right and true... and in turn are built up.

"Thank you Lord Jesus for dying in my place..., that you will never leave me or forsake me..." and so on.

"but, *speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head..Christ*". ( Ephesians 4:15)  
Now it's just me... but I imagine our words in this instance of thanksgiving to The Lord, reverberating in the spirit, like a lion's roar ... and that strongholds will crumble and fall... and anxiety and fear will fade away as we acknowledge the very great love of our Father and the finished work of Christ.  
Believing and speaking it out. We're His children after all ...and when He speaks things happen !

Just to round this off for now, if we could look at a Psalm that presents this picture of our oneness with each other and with the Lord so well..... and King David had that gift didn't he, of being able to present a picture in just a few words but which spoke volumes, such as....  
"The Lord is my shepherd" .... and.... " as the deer pants for the water, so my heart pants after you".  
Images that convey so much and then keep on giving the more one thinks about them.

Obviously it was the Lord who inspired David to write those things, so this is His way of expressing a lot of information very simply, using images...and it occurred to me how in the church as well, The Lord will very often give someone a mental picture to accompany a word of prophecy, etc.  
Anyways Psalm 133 is just such an example.... (NKJV)

“.....Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !

It is like... the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.

It is like... the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion;

For there the LORD commanded the blessing--Life forevermore.

Wonderful depictions of The Lord Jesus and his church....and in both cases, it's this oneness again....

Of shared blessing..., and shared anointing.... Because of our oneness with The Lord and with each other... The anointing, (*the dew*), which comes first upon the head, then flows over the whole body, (*the mountain range*).

The first example being Aaron, when he was anointed as High Priest... and of the High Priestly anointing oil that Moses poured upon his head, which then ran down over his face and clothing, right down to the hem of his garments.

The other, if you can picture it, or see the image on the screen, is of Mt Hermon in northern Israel, which at over 9,000ft, is the tallest of all the adjoining peaks that are round about in this great mountain chain of which it is a part. It's the highest point in Israel.

Interestingly Mt Hermon is actually comprised of 3 peaks of similar heights.

When covered in snow, it can easily be mistaken for a bank of white clouds towering behind the hills in the foreground... and with blue sky often as a backdrop it looks majestic.

What happens is that it attracts moisture from the warm air that's been forced to rise in it's attempt to pass over the top, this then cools and falls as rain or snow.

This is the thing, the whole region benefits because of Mt Hermon.

That's the picture in this psalm, that all the surrounding lesser, “*mountains of Zion*”, which are all part of the same mountain range, all benefit from the precipitation that Mt Hermon attracts.

“... *the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion*” ;

So that there are springs, streams..., forested mountains and hills, below the snow line ...., even nature reserves, all flourishing because of their oneness with Mt Hermon.

Even the source of the river Jordan is from these mountains, which in a region that is otherwise quite arid, is really quite something.

It's a wonderful picture of The Lord and His church, of our identity with Him and with one another, as members of His body. It's in the oneness... that the blessing flows from The Lord Jesus our head.

“*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*”, Ephesians 1:3

This is what Paul constantly urged the folks to acknowledge...., their new identity now in Christ.

In fact when we think of 'Christ' meaning anointed one, of course this is The Lord Jesus .... but we should also think in terms of The Lord Jesus and his church.

“*the precious oil upon the head, Running down ....., Running down to the edge of his garments*”.

So having represented us all in his death and resurrection, we have been called into fellowship with The Lord Jesus, it's what our walk of faith is all about. As the chorus has it...

“*I'm one with my Saviour a branch of the vine, I'm raised up with Jesus to a new life divine .....*etc”

He died, therefore I died. He was raised, I was raised. Glorified, he sits now at the Father's right hand, therefore so do I. Our identity and future, is wrapped up in him.

*Colossians 3:1-4 "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. **For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory".*

And I think that's a good place to stop for now..... hopefully another time we can complete this. It was hard to hold back here, the temptation being to try and squeeze everything in ....because it opened up after this in a way I didn't expect and was very encouraging, at least it was for me.

So we'll look again at John 17 as everything is there, ' the declaration of His name', 'His Word received and believed', 'beholding the glory of The Lord' and being 'filled with the love of God'.  
Yeh, all good stuff. So I'm looking forward to the next bit.

Thanks again for the opportunity to be a part of things, I'm really grateful for the chance to share something, it means a great deal. Just remember we all have a unique place in Christ and we are all loved and needed.

Praise The Lord for all his lovingkindness, faithfulness and tender mercies . He's so good.

Chris Pople