

The 5 Stages of Spiritual Growth

Pastor Roy L. Crane, Calvary Bible Church, Midway, Arkansas
(based on material initially collected by Dr. Richard Ledet)

Introduction

Beginning with the command that we “must be born again”, we see that the Christian life is a parallel to our physical life in that we are “born”, then we are supposed to grow, and finally we are to attain maturity. So many Christians forget that once we are “born”, there is a call to not just “be alive *in* the Lord”, but to “live *for* the Lord”. In the New Testament, five different Greek words are used to describe the various “stages” of the Christian life. These words are “NEPIOS”, “PAIDION”, “TEKNON”, “HUIOS”, and “TELIOS”. Each one describes a different stage of *spiritual* growth and maturity, and relates to a stage of normal *physical* growth and maturity. As we look at each one of these stages, see where you fit in the “growth chart”, and remember that our goal is to GROW toward true maturity in Christ. Although it is possible to “stagnate” in any of these stages, that is NOT the normal and desired result, any more that we want to see one of our children stay at the “infant” stage of development for years and years.

Lesson 1: NEPIOS

Strong’s # 3516 νήπιος [*nepios /nay·pee·os/*] adj. **1** an infant, little child. **2** a minor, not of age. **3** metaphorically used for childish, untaught, unskilled.

New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries:
Updated edition νήπιος *nepios*; *an infant, figuratively a simple-minded or immature person.*

The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words - nepios, νη- ne- (implying *negation*) and *not speaking*, i.e. an *infant (minor)*; fig. a *simple-minded person, an immature Christian*

Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words - nepios (νήπιος, 3516), literally meaning, “without the power of speech,” denotes “a little child,” the literal meaning having been lost in the general use of the word. It is used (a) of “infants,” Matthew 21:16; (b) metaphorically, of the unsophisticated in mind and trustful in disposition, Matthew 11:25 and Luke 10:21, where it stands in contrast to the wise; of those who are possessed merely of natural knowledge, Romans 2:20; of those who are carnal, and have not grown, as they should have done, in spiritual understanding and power, the spiritually immature, 1st Corinthians 3:1, those who are so to speak partakers of milk, and “without experience of the word of righteousness,” Hebrews 5:13; of the Jews, who, while the

Law was the only known revelation, were in a state corresponding to that of childhood, or minority, just as the word “infant” is used of a minor, in English law, Galatians 4:3, “children”; of believers in an immature condition, impressionable and liable to be imposed upon instead of being in a state of spiritual maturity, Ephesians 4:14, “children.” “Immaturity” is always associated with this word. *Note:* The corresponding verb, *nepiazo*, is found in 1st Corinthians 14:20, where believers are exhorted to be as “babes” (RV) in malice, unable to think or speak maliciously.

The NEPIOS Christian is “born again”, but is still an “infant” in the faith. They are:

- A) still in bondage under the elements of the world (Galatians 4:1-3),
- B) still led by “the flesh” (1st Corinthians 3:1-4),
- C) unskilled and unwise in the Word, able to easily be led astray (Ephesians 4:14-15, Hebrews 5:13), and cannot teach others the Gospel (Matthew 28:19)

What does a NEPIOS need to do in order to grow?

- A) Obey God and His Word in ALL things (Romans 6:16, James 1:22) (to do this, you must spend a lot of TIME in the Word, so you will know what it says for you to do)
- B) Walk daily in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17)
- C) Learn to NOT follow the world’s definition of what you NEED (1st Timothy 6:10-12)
- D) Re-train (reprogram) your mind to be “in tune” with God’s way of looking at things (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8)
- E) Bring your body (desires) under control (1st Corinthians 9:24-27, 1st Thessalonians 4:4-5, 1st Thessalonians 4:11-12)
- F) Find good and Godly, Biblically correct teachers to learn from (1st Corinthians 4:12-17, Hebrews 6:11-12)

1st Corinthians 13:11

“When I was a child (NEPIOS), I spoke as a child (NEPIOS), I understood as a child (NEPIOS), I thought as a child (NEPIOS); but when I became a man, I put away childish (NEPIOS) things.

Lesson 2: PAIDION

New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries :
Updated edition - παιδίον **paidion**; dim. of 3816; a young child:

The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words - #3813
παιδίον **paidion**, *pahee-dee'-on*; neut. dimin. of 3816; a *childling* (of either sex), a half-grown *boy* or girl; fig. an *immature*

Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words In Mark 10:13, KJV, *paidion*, in the neuter plural, is rendered "young (RV, 'little') children."

The term paidion was used for children after they were approximately 2 years old, up to the age of 11 or 12 (prior to their bar-mitzvah for boys). During this stage of life in the "natural" or physical world, a child begins to discover their own will, and to want their own way. Rebellion can begin to show, and discipline is needed to correct it. In the spiritual realm, the same is true. Paidion believers seem to experience a resurgence of the Adamic nature, and rebelliousness against the "rules" of Christian living. See Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15.

What is the positive characteristic of the PAIDION stage?

They truly can begin to **know** the Father (1st John 2:13). An infant (NEPIOS, in the flesh) perceives their father as a familiar part of the environment. A PAIDION can begin to develop a true relationship with their father as they do things together. In the spiritual realm, this is also true as we grow from just knowing God as the One who has given us life, to knowing Him as the One who walks with us and talks with us. We can also DRAMATICALLY grow in our knowledge and relationship with the Father during this stage. See Luke 1:80 and Luke 2:40. During this stage, a person can learn obedience and service, but only if they do not rebel against it. The PAIDION also begins to learn about deception, and recognizing the true doctrine as opposed to the false. See 1st John 2:18. If they do NOT learn this difference, they are susceptible to their "imagination" running wild, and following wild ideas. PAIDIONS absolutely need to be in a good, solid fellowships so they can learn, grow, and be disciplined. See Hebrews 10:25

What does a PAIDION need to do in order to grow?

All of the same things as a NEPIOS (see the list below), with special attention on 2 areas;

DISCIPLINE – developing good spiritual habits and submitting to God in every area of life, See Hebrews 12:1-11, and the following definition: Word Pictures In The New Testament – Volume 1 - Mark 10:15 *As a little child (hoos paidion)*. “How does a little child receive the kingdom of God? *The little child learns to obey its parents simply and uncomplainingly.* Some new psychologists argue against teaching obedience to children. The results have not been inspiring. Jesus here presents the little child with trusting, simple, and loving obedience as the model for adults in coming into the kingdom. Jesus does not here say that children are in the kingdom of God because they are children.”

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS OUR FATHER – learning to “walk with Him, and talk with Him”, and to develop joy in His presence. See Romans 8:14-17, 2nd Corinthians 6:18, Psalm 16:11, Philippians 4:4-7

What a NEPIOS and a PAIDION needs:

- G) Obey God and His Word in ALL things (Romans 6:16, James 1:22)
(to do this, you must spend a lot of TIME in the Word, so you will know what it says for you to do)
- H) Walk daily in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17)
- I) Learn to NOT follow the world’s definition of what you NEED (1st Timothy 6:10-12)
- J) Re-train (reprogram) your mind to be “in tune” with God’s way of looking at things (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8)
- K) Bring your body (desires) under control (1st Corinthians 9:24-27, 1st Thessalonians 4:4-5, 1st Thessalonians 4:11-12)
- L) Find good and Godly, Biblically correct teachers to learn from (1st Corinthians 4:12-17, Hebrews 6:11-12)

Lesson 3: TEKNON

Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek

5451 τέκνον (teknon), descendant (Acts 2:39); disciple, one who follows a teacher in authority (3rd John 4)

Enhanced Strong's Lexicon

5043 τέκνον [teknon /tek·non/] n n. 1B2 in affectionate address, such as patrons, helpers, teachers and the like employ: my child. 1B3 in the NT, pupils or disciples are called children of their teachers, because the latter by their instruction nourish the minds of their pupils and mould their characters.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

In early life, a child was more directly under the control of the mother than the father; the mother was its first teacher (Proverbs 1:8). Thereafter the father was expected to direct the training of the son [teknon] (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 12:26; 13:8,14,15; Deuteronomy 6:7)

The Works of John Wesley, "The Doctrine of Original Sin"

Thus St. Paul calls Timothy, gnhsion teknon, 'his own, genuine son in the faith;' not to signify he was the child of the Apostle, but that he was a real imitator of his faith.

What are the characteristics of the TEKNON?

In the natural sense, the TEKNON is a teenager. Beginning at the age of 12-13 (bar mitzvah), until approximately 25-30 years old (when a son could assume his father's business), a TEKNON was a young man who was being trained in his profession. It is also a time when the rebelliousness of youth (if it had not been dealt with fully in the NEPIOS and PAIDION stages) would reach "full flower". Teenagers are generally known for wanting their own way, thinking they know everything, and not wanting any accountability. On the other hand, at this stage of life they can experience tremendous growth, and are capable of learning a tremendous amount. Once again, as it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual. A TEKNON Christian is truly a disciple. In fact, the apostle's seem to have been at this stage of spiritual growth when Jesus was crucified and resurrected, as seen in His comments to them in John 13:33-35, where the term "little children" is actually "TEKNIA", the plural of TEKNON.

It is during the TEKNON stages that many "church splits" occur, as different TEKNON's strive to be in control of a given church (see Luke 22:24-27). However, if properly disciplined and controlled, the TEKNON's can be a

vital force in the church, as their enthusiasm and growth in the Lord can fuel evangelism and growth in the church. The TEKNON does not know enough to “run the business” yet, but they are able to evangelize and support the various outreaches of the church. See Numbers 8:23-24.

What does a TEKNON need to do in order to grow?

All of the same things as a NEPIOS and a PAIDION (see the list below), with special attention on 2 areas;

Controlling the sense of PRIDE and EGO that makes us want to “have it our own way”. See Luke 22:24-27, Romans 12:3, 1st Timothy 3:6.

Being TRAINED for the work of serving God. This does not mean that every Christians is supposed to be a “PASTOR”, but every Christian IS supposed to grow in knowledge of the Word, and in the ability to USE IT. See 2nd Timothy 2:15, 1st Corinthians 14:20, Philippians 3:8-16, Hebrews 5:13-14.

What a NEPIOS, PAIDION, and TEKNON needs:

- M) Obey God and His Word in ALL things (Romans 6:16, James 1:22)
(to do this, you must spend a lot of TIME in the Word, so you will know what it says for you to do)
- N) Walk daily in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17)
- O) Learn to NOT follow the world’s definition of what you NEED (1st Timothy 6:10-12)
- P) Re-train (reprogram) your mind to be “in tune” with God’s way of looking at things (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8)
- Q) Bring your body (desires) under control (1st Corinthians 9:24-27, 1st Thessalonians 4:4-5, 1st Thessalonians 4:11-12)
- R) Find good and Godly, Biblically correct teachers to learn from (1st Corinthians 4:12-17, Hebrews 6:11-12)
- S) Discipline (Hebrews 12:1-11)
- T) Fellowship with God (Romans 8:14-17, 2nd Corinthians 6:18, Psalm 16:11, Philippians 4:4-7)

Lesson 4: HUIOS

Enhanced Strong's Lexicon - **5207 υἱός** [*huios* /hwee·os/] - 3D - those who revere God as their father, the pious worshippers of God, those who in character and life resemble God, those who are governed by the Spirit of God, repose the same calm and joyful trust in God which children do in their parents (Romans 8:14, Galatians 3:26), and hereafter in the blessedness and glory of the life eternal will openly wear this dignity of the sons of God. Term used preeminently of Jesus Christ, as enjoying the supreme love of God, united to him in affectionate intimacy, privy to his saving councils, obedient to the Father's will in all his acts.

The difference between believers as “children of God” and as “sons of God” is brought out in Romans 8:14-21. The Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are “children of God,” and, as such, they are His heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. This stresses the fact of their spiritual birth (vv. 16, 17). On the other hand, “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God,” i.e., “these and no other.” Their conduct gives evidence of the dignity of their relationship and their likeness to His character.

What is a HUIOS Christian?

A HUIOS is a Christian who has reached maturity in Christ, and who is consistently led by (and lives in) the Spirit of God. Although there are numerous consequences of being consistently led by the Spirit, probably most of them would be bound up in the statement of Galatians 5:22–24. The Spirit in the life of the believer will produce the ***fruit*** of the Spirit. In contrast to the deeds of the flesh produced by a walk according to the flesh (Galatians 5:19–21), the life of the Spirit produces “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (vv. 22–23). Additionally, mature believers will be receptive to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (1st Corinthians 2:9–13; John 16:12–15); will exhibit joy, unity, and thankfulness in the assembly (Ephesians 5:19–20); will be unified and discerning in ministry (1st Thessalonians 5:17–22); and will show dedication to God and nonconformity to the world (Romans 12:1–2).

In addition, the HUIOS Christian will ***use*** the spiritual gifts that God has given them to edify (build up) the Body of Christ, to the purpose of helping all believers achieve maturity and to live as holy “sons” of God (see Ephesians 4:7-24).

The HUIOS is the culmination of the previous three stages of growth. The NEPIOS receives life; the PAIDION learns to love God and have fellowship with Him; and the TEKNON learns to serve God (apprenticeship) by

learning to apply His Word and to develop their gifts. The HUIOS truly lives in God through His Spirit, walks in fellowship with Him daily, and uses the Word and the gifts for “God’s business” as a mature son.

At age 30, Jesus began His ministry as a HUIOS (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus had been born (physically), and had grown and matured (Luke 2:52), and now the time was right for Him to “take up the Father’s business”.

For the Christian, the HUIOS stage is when true church leaders arise, as mature men and women of God put into effect what they have learned of the Lord up to this point. They are mature, know the difference between good and evil, have discernment, manifest the fruit of the Spirit, have the gift or gifts that God has given them active in their life, bring unity to the church, and live holy lives on a consistent basis.

Lesson 5: TELEIOS

Dict. of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament). 5455 τέλειος (*teleios*), 1. (morally) perfect (Mt 5:48; Jas 3:2), for another interpretation, see below; 2. **genuine**, being true (1st John 4:18); 3. (physically) **perfect** (Heb 9:11); 4. **complete**, finished (Jas 1:4); 5. **mature** in one's behavior (Eph 4:13; Mt 5:48), for another interpretation, see above; 6. **adult** (Heb 5:14);

Enhanced Strong's Lexicon

5046 τέλειος [*teleios* /tel·i·os/] adj. 1 brought to its end, finished. 2 wanting nothing necessary to completeness. 3 perfect. 4 that which is perfect. 4A consummate human integrity and virtue. 4B of men. 4B1 full grown, adult, of full age, mature.

KJV Bible commentary

Perfect (Gr. *teleios*) describes the man who has reached his goal, the man who is self-controlled. That being the case in speech, he is **able also to bridle the whole body**, because the tongue resists control more than any other area of behavior. **Bridle** pictures restrained guidance.

New Bible dictionary

PERFECTION. The biblical idea of perfection is of a state of ideal wholeness or completion, in which any disabilities, shortcomings or defects that may have existed before have been eliminated or left behind. In the NT the usual adjective (19 times) is *teleios* (noun *teleiotes*, Col. 3:14; Heb. 6:1), which expresses the thought of having reached the appropriate or appointed *telos* ('end' in the sense of 'goal', 'purpose'). The corresponding verb, *teleioo* (16 times in this sense), means to bring into such a condition. In secular Greek *teleios* means also: (i) adult, full-grown, as opposed to immature and infantile, and (ii), in connection with mystery-cults, fully initiated. The former sense shines through in 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14 *cf.* 6:1; the latter in 1 Cor. 2:6 and perhaps Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28.

The teacher's commentary. (Heb 9:1)

The Greek word, teleios, speaks of a perfection that is related to the purpose or function for which a thing or person is designed.

Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words.

teleios (τελείως, 5049) signifies "having reached its end" (*telos*), "finished, complete perfect." It is used (l) of persons, (a) primarily of physical

development, then, with ethical import, “fully grown, mature,” 1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20 (“men”; marg., “of full age”); Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28; 4:12; in Heb. 5:14, RV, “full-grown” (marg., “perfect”), KJV, “of full age” (marg., “perfect”); (b) “complete,” conveying the idea of goodness without necessary reference to maturity or what is expressed under (a).

The Life of Christ: A study guide to the Gospel record - God Is Your Model (Matthew 5:48)

Therefore you shall be perfect = (lit.) Be you therefore perfect (an imperative). perfect = (or) complete, mature.

All these examples are founded on one principle “Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v.48). We, the believers, are His emissaries in this world: our function is to display Him; that is to be our primary objective. With this as a man’s objective, his priorities change completely. This is what Jesus expects of citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and John 3 tells us that all who believe in Him are citizens of that Kingdom. The Greek word translated ‘perfect’ in English is *teleios* which means literally ‘end,’ i.e., ‘completion’ and thence ‘complete.’ This is the connotation ‘perfect’ has here; it means ‘complete,’ ‘mature.’ This concept is humbling, for Jesus says that the man who displays anger is immature; the one who even thinks of gratifying physical lust, the one who divorces his wife, the one who supports his undertakings with oaths, the one who safeguards his rights, the one who hates enemies—all such men are immature. Spirituality conquers all these basic raw human emotions. A person is not a complete person until he has these things under control. He calls for a standard of behavior from the citizens in the Kingdom of God that is so high that it makes breaking any of the commandments impossible. In other words, standards of conduct in God’s Kingdom should be so high that the Ten Commandments become redundant. Thereafter, Jesus went on to explain that the believer’s code of conduct should be so high that he no longer needs the latitude that the Law allowed in its ‘exception’ clauses (i.e., divorce and the use of oaths). Finally, Jesus gave two examples which show that the believer should be so committed to upholding the very spirit of the law of his heavenly Father’s Kingdom that he will be prepared to set aside those personal rights which the Law provides him in order to further the cause of that Kingdom. The grand concept is ‘be perfect, even as God is perfect.’

Consider this carefully, for this is the challenge Jesus put to His audience—and that includes you. Are you a mature Christian in your Lord’s sight? Are you striving to be? Are you anxious to be? The standard for the believer is

perfection. Paul, under inspiration, explains this 'perfection' or 'completeness' in Eph 4:13 (the same Greek word is used here).

This idea of "being complete" indicates that TELEIOS Christianity is what God desires for ALL Christians to grow into. This is the goal for mankind in this life. While we will not achieve absolute perfection in this life, since we are still "trapped" in a physical body that is tainted by sin and its' effects upon the physical universe, we can achieve "perfection" in the sense that we become all that God desires us to be in this life. That is, to become a fully mature Christian, with our mind operating in GOD'S way, with our flesh under control, manifesting the fruit and character of God as a fully functioning part of the Body of Christ, showing God's glory in every relationship, living a holy life, understanding and obeying His Word.

This brings us back to the same question of priorities, for God is saying through the pages of your Bible that maturity, or the full, complete man, is demonstrated by his spiritual concerns. Do you put GOD'S priorities first in all things? Do you exhibit GOD'S love to all, even those who violate what the world would call "your rights"? Do you accurately reflect the glory of God to the world in your life?

As we come to the end of this study, each of us needs to examine ourselves to see where we fall on the "Christian Growth Chart". Not considering how many YEARS we have been a Christian; the question is how much have we GROWN as a Christian? Are we still an infant (NEPIOS)? Are we a little child (PAIDION)? Are we a teenager (TEKNON)? Have we grown to adulthood, and are "apprenticed" to the work of God, our Father (HUIOS)? Or have we grown to full maturity, the goal that God has always wanted for us (TELEIOS)?

What are we doing to grow in the Lord? Are we stagnant at an immature phase of our Christian life, or do we "press on toward the mark of the high calling of Christ"?