

11. Let's grow up

February 22, 2015

There is nothing like the images and laughing sounds of a baby that disarms us. You may not know the baby, but if you see a baby's laughing or smiling, it stops you on your track, doesn't it?

Then, the baby starts to grow. His incomprehensible sounds start to change with words and those wildly swinging arms become more coordinated with his mind. More growth comes along with a new title – toddler and much more movement. Now he is a little boy and he is able to carry on conversations with you. So far, so good.

But what if, for whatever the reason is, his body is continually growing, but his mind decided that he doesn't want to grow. What if, his body is at the age of 24 years old, but his mind is still stuck in the age of 7. That is not a pleasant thought, is it?

Unfortunately, many born-again Christians experience this kind of abnormal under-growth spiritually. After they get saved by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, they are excited about their new found faith in the Lord. They start to attend the church services faithfully, they meet other believers in the church and start to hang out with them even outside of the church activities.

Then, for whatever reason, they start to slow down in attending church services, because they come up with many excuses why they cannot go to church on Sunday morning. But they sure don't have a problem to do whatever they want to do. Oh, they still go to church once in a while, feeling like it is a duty or just try to pacify God so that He wouldn't convict them too much in their hearts.

Or some may attend church services faithfully every Sunday like clockwork. But they don't read the Bible or pray throughout the week. The only time they open their Bible is when they come to church. When difficulties of life come along, they don't do well. Or when some new fancy doctrines are introduced by someone, they fall for them without checking them against the Word of God.

I just described many born-again Christians' weekly spiritual status. The author of the Book of Hebrews is going to show us three marks of spiritual immaturity as well as the marks of spiritual maturity. This morning I wouldn't be surprised if the Holy Spirit convicts us a little more than other times.

A. DULL OF HEARING

Hebrews 5:11 of whom [Melchizedek] we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The preceding discussion about Melchizedek and the priesthood of Christ was a complex one. As I said, we will learn more about Melchizedek when we get to chapter 7.

These Jewish Christians had advantages over us. They were born in Israel and as they grew up, they were familiar with the whole Levitical sacrificial system that pointed to Jesus Christ our Lord. That is where they cut their theological teeth a long time ago. By now, their faith in Jesus Christ should have given them the capacity to digest some meaty theologies and had a better and deeper Christian living. But it was not the case. What happened? Because of what they had become – "dull of hearing."

The Greek word for 'dull' is "nothros" and it has the connotation of 'lazy.' Because the word comes from two words, meaning "no" and "push." In other words, many people in this Hebrew Christian church became spiritually lazy and didn't push themselves to learn the Word of God. We find the opposite attitude from the congregation of the church of Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

It is my hope and prayer that all of you in our church have the same attitude like the people in the Thessalonian church, not like the one in Israel.

Why does this laziness happen? I find two reasons:

1) Some Christians become dull because they choose not to grow up. This is where the backsliding starts.

It is almost like some Christians think that since their eternal fire insurance was issued by the Lord Jesus, they don't have to do anything. They might have been in church settings for a long time, but their spiritual ages still remain in baby or toddler stage. Spiritual maturity has nothing to do with how long you've been in the Lord or how many Bible verses a believer memorizes or using Christian jargon flawlessly.

I've met many Christians who've been with the Lord for 10, 20 or even 30 years, but their spiritual maturity is not keeping up with the years they are with the Lord. That's a sad fact.

2) People become dull because their poor spiritual habits prevent them from healthy growth.

People say, "I am so busy that I don't have time to read the Bible and pray daily." That's a flat out lie and they know it. Because they always find time to do whatever they want to do. They don't make a spiritual habit to read the Word of God daily, or pray daily. To them, God is nothing more than a spiritual 911 first responder. They say, "Don't call me, God. I'll call you when I am desperate and cannot turn to anyone or anything else." It is no wonder that they fall apart and are in complete disarray spiritually at the first wave of attack from the enemy.

B. INABILITY TO SHARE

Hebrews 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God;

As our children grew up, what did we have to teach them and remind them over and over? Sharing. It is a typical human selfish nature. Here is the "Sibling Property Rules".

If I like it, it's mine.

If I am holding it, it's mine.

If I can take it from you, it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.

If it looks like mine, it's mine.

If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.

If it's broken, it's yours.

Not everyone is called to be a Bible teacher from God. But it should be a yearning desire of every believer of Christ to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with some-

one who does not know. But many Christians choose not to do so, because they are afraid that the people whom they share with might reject them or ask them difficult questions that they don't know. Let me remind all of you what the Lord Jesus told us to do:

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

What do you know, it happens to be a command from the Lord Jesus to all of us. Listen, the ability to share spiritual truth with others is one of the marks of Christian maturity.

C. A BABY FOOD DIET

Hebrews 5:12b-13 and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

I used to feed my grandson Micah with his baby formula and baby foods when he was a baby. He loved eating those things. But when I tasted them, they were awful. The formula's smell was horrible and the baby food had a funny taste. While Micah was swallowing his food as fast as I could bring it to his mouth, I murmured, "How can you like this thing?" Obviously he didn't have a problem. But now Micah eats grown up foods. He even likes salads. His mom and dad ruined him.

The "milk" of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ did on earth – His birth, life, sacrifice on the cross, death, burial, and resurrection. The "meat" of the Word refers to what Jesus is doing in heaven as our Great High Priest as well as the teachings that Jesus gave us while He was on earth and what the apostles taught us in the Bible.

Let's compare some similarities of physical baby and spiritual baby:

Physical baby can go from happy to hysterical crying in a matter of seconds.

Spiritual baby can be swayed by every wind of doctrine.

Physical baby sleeps a lot.

Spiritual baby can spend much time spiritually asleep.

Physical baby wants his way only and selfish.

Spiritual baby expects others to cater to him and doesn't care about others.

This Book, Hebrews, is not a diet for "spiritual babies" who want to be spoon-fed and coddled. In this Book you will find "strong meat" that demands some "spiritual molars" for chewing, enjoying, and growing.

A side note for a public announcement: The Lord willing, after we move into our own building, we will have plenty of classrooms where we can do "New believers' Foundation Classes" before Sunday morning service. If you are a relatively new Christian or didn't get to have a good Christian foundation previously, I highly recommend you to take these courses. Paul Ostrowski will teach men, and Pat Campbell will teach ladies.

D. MARKS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

I am not saying that spiritually grown ups don't need milk – the basic truth of Christianity. Of course, we need it and we stand on it. But we shouldn't stop there.

We must make spiritual progress. As we learn the Word of God more in depth, we need to apply what we learn in our daily lives.

1) Good spiritual nutrition and challenging exercises

I've learned many things in working out. There are two things stand out among them – challenging exercises and good nutrition. When you work out, if you do the same exercises over and over, your muscles get used to them and stop growing and stop increasing strength. Routinely, you have to change the workout programs to challenge your muscles in a way to shock them.

The same goes for our spiritual muscles. Our Lord knows what kind of challenges we need in our lives so He allows enough shocks to come into our lives so that we can exercise our spiritual muscles and grow.

And eating proper foods is also very important in growing as we learned. To build physical muscles and strength, you have to consume a lot of proteins, the right amount of veggies, fats, and carbs. You cannot have donuts, Mountain Dew, and Monster Drink and expect that they would help your muscles. You might be able to pump the weight a couple more times while you are hyped up in a boatload of sugar, but you will crash rather quickly.

Again the same goes for our spiritual foods. You cannot exercise your spiritual muscles and expect to face shocking challenges if you don't have enough nutrition in your body. Your spiritual foods only come from the Word of God, the Bible.

There is a pastor whom I consider an excellent Bible teacher. He believes that he should put spiritual cookies on the bottom shelf where everyone can reach. But I respectfully disagree with his idea of Bible teaching. I don't want all the spiritual foods I prepare for you guys on Sunday morning and Midweek Services in the lowest common denominator. I want you who are relatively new to reach up and make an effort to take good foods. They have to have challenges. And for those who are rather mature can still get good foods.

2) Keen discernment both good and evil

A baby will put anything into its mouth. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures. They just assume that these preachers and teachers on TV are telling them the right things.

As we grow in the Lord through His Word, we learn to use what we learn from the Bible in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our "spiritual senses" and develop spiritual discernment.

Guess what, you don't get your keen biblical discernment from a hocus pocus crystal ball. You get it from the Bible as the Holy Spirit speaks to you. How can you hear Him speaking? Praying, reading His Word daily, and obeying what it says.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) When the Lord brings a spiritual challenge to you, do not despise it. Whether we like it or not, God knows that we need to grow through it.

2) Christian growth comes through hard-core, gutsy perseverance of applying what you hear from the Bible and obeying it.