

HOLY HELPS

SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

Hebrews 6:1

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”

The opposite of maturity is immaturity. In the passage in I Corinthians chapter 3 the Apostle Paul is contrasting spiritual maturity with spiritual immaturity. He is not “putting down” those who have recently been born into the family of God and are therefore yet spiritual babies. He is addressing those in the Corinthian church who have been believers long enough to be spiritual adults. Chronological age is no guarantee of spiritual maturity.

In one of his books, James Emery White tells of the Russian-American comic, Yakov Smirnoff’s, initial response to the incredible variety of instant products available in American grocery stores. He said, “On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to my self, what a country!”

Wouldn’t it be great if conception and childbirth were that easy? Maybe not. Wouldn’t it be great to just add water to our spiritual births and voila! Instant spiritual maturity! However, it isn’t that easy, is it?

Rick Warren notes that spiritual maturity occurs when a believer “Takes off the bib and puts on an apron.” Immature children wear bibs and expect others to meet their needs. Those who don aprons have learned the joy of serving others. Which attire are you wearing?

I Corinthians chapter 2 is the background for what Paul says in I Corinthians 3:1-3. In chapter 2 he writes about faith, (2:5); the Holy Spirit, (2:10,11,12,13,14) and wisdom (2:1,4,5,6,7,13). He writes to correct them and challenge them to grow up spiritually. Their immaturity, which is evident in chapter 3:1-3, resulted in their failure to walk in faith, to walk in the Spirit and to walk in wisdom.

Characteristics of Spiritual Immaturity

Warren W. Wiersbe wrote in his book *Be Mature*, “I am convinced that spiritual immaturity is the number one problem in our churches.” Some characteristics of the spiritually immature are:

- Infantile appetites.
“*I have fed you with milk*” i.e. simplest and easiest truths, because you were incapable of comprehending the higher truths of the Gospel, i.e. “*solid food.*”)

The writer of Hebrews encourages such to “*leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.*” (Heb 6:1) and he writes further: “*solid food is for the mature...*” (Heb. 5:14).

A saintly lady who was a missionary in India for over 50 years and later became an invalid as a result of a fall, continued to have ministry from her bed for 20 years, writing books and poetry. Her name? Amy Carmichael. She said, “May the Lord help us to smash our baby bottles and feed on His strong meat!”

- Fleshliness - *“you are still fleshly”*
- Jealousy - *“there is jealousy”*
- Strife - *“and strife among you”*
- Living like sinners - *“walking like mere men”* - unchanged lifestyle.

It is to be lamented that many who should walk as changed persons, that is, as new creations in Christ, live and act the same as unchanged persons. They walk *“After the flesh, not after the Spirit.”*

The word "walk" is used often in the Scriptures in the sense of "conduct" or "manner of living." "Walking" is a metaphor that communicates to us that we go through life stepping one step at a time. We began physical life as infants and crawled before we walked and walked before we ran. These stages of growth are natural in the physical realm. Likewise, they are true in the realm of the spiritual as well.

The I Corinthians 3:1-3 paragraph is directed at immature believers – those who are infantile in their conduct. He wrote: *“My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That's why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world.”* (cev)

Why do some Christians remain immature? Jesus gives us the answer. He was speaking about the seed of the Word of God and the soil into which it falls. He said, in Luke 8:14 *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”* (niv)

That is a sad commentary on many who have taken the name “Christian” but whose lives are stunted. They have not grown spiritually and even though they have attained to physical adulthood they are yet spiritual babies.

Not all believers are immature. Spiritually mature persons have grown up and are no longer spiritual infants. Their walk is different from that of the immature. Instead of walking as unchanged persons their lives evidence the fact that they indeed are *“a new creation”* and that *“the old has gone, the new has come!”* (II Cor. 5:17 niv) May their numbers increase!

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