

Maturing in Christ

M. W. Bassford

3-30-08

Introduction.

- A. As a lot of you already know, Lauren and I have two really good friends named Phillip and Tracy. Phillip and Tracy live in Florida, but they're in the process of moving to Kentucky. At the beginning of this year, they had a wonderful baby boy named Andrew. Andrew's a big boy; at his two-month checkup, he already weighed 14.5 pounds. Tracy has a brother named Trevor, and Trevor and his wife have a darling baby girl named Addison. Addison is a year old, but despite her greater age, she weighs a little bit less than her much younger cousin. What's a tremendous source of joy in Andrew is a tremendous source of alarm in Addison, because it says that there's something wrong with her. In fact, there is something wrong with her. She has a serious heart condition that keeps her from gaining weight, and Christians all over the country are praying for her.
- B. Addison's story is a sad one, but what's even sadder is the indifference that many of us feel when we are suffering from the same problem. Just like she has a heart condition that keeps her from growing, many Christians have a heart condition that keeps them from growing. They've been Christians for years or perhaps decades, but they only show the spiritual development of a babe in Christ. Obviously, Addison's problems are not her fault, but these spiritually stunted brethren are responsible for their own condition. They've let their indifference to the things of God turn them into spiritual Addisons, and it's a condition that could prove fatal.
- C. The thing is, friends, God doesn't want us to just obey the gospel and then spend our whole lives in that same spiritual position. Just like children are expected to grow, so Christians are expected to grow. Every day, we need to be a little more spiritually minded, a little more committed, a little better able to do God's work. If we aren't growing in this way, we're actually spiritually dying instead. Because spiritual growth is so important, let's spend some time studying it this morning. Let's look at maturing in Christ.

I. Why Mature?

- A. As we study this topic, the first thing we need to figure out is why we need to mature in the first place. Who's to say that God wouldn't be happy if we stayed the way that we are right now? For an answer to this, let's look at 1 Peter 2:1-3. There are two things in this passage to which we need to pay attention. First of all, notice how important the word of God ought to be to the spiritually immature. Peter says that the new Christian ought to long for the word the way that a newborn baby longs for milk. Folks, that's a pretty intense longing! Just look around at all of our new parents. They're easy to identify. They're the ones with bags under their eyes the size of bowling balls because their little ones cry out at all hours of the day and night for more milk. That's the way that Peter instructs the new Christian to seek out the word of God.
- B. Peter also tells us that as a result of this spiritual nourishment, we are expected to grow. Just as the physical newborn will grow by leaps and bounds because of all the food he's taking in, so too the new Christian is supposed to grow. It's not OK for us to remain right where we are forever. It's not OK for us to stay spiritual children even after decades in the service of Christ. Instead, we're meant to mature.
- C. We see a more detailed look at this maturation process in Romans 12:2. This is the effect that the nourishment of the word of God is supposed to have on us. As we study the Bible, it renews our mind. We think a little bit less like the world, and a little more like Him. Bit by bit, we are transformed into His image. However, spiritual growth is not merely something that happens between the ears. Instead, just as the growth of a child is evident by the way he acts, so too our actions show our growth. As this passage says, we begin to prove what the will of God is. Throughout our lives, we generally become more and more pleasing to God.
- D. All of this, of course, is a process, and at its beginning, spiritual immaturity is inevitable. There is no Christian on earth who starts out spiritually mature. However, there are some significant problems with remaining immature when we should have grown up already. Paul describes one of these problems in Ephesians 4:14-15. When we are immature, we are spiritually dependent on others. That dependence makes us vulnerable to those who teach false doctrine, because we don't know enough to tell truth from error. As a result, we are tossed about by every wind of doctrine, and can even be swept away. Only maturity can protect us.
- E. For instance, even as we speak, there is a movement afoot in many churches of Christ to begin using mechanical instruments of music in worship. Let's say, God forbid, that I am persuaded by this movement and begin to say that we should put a piano in the corner over there. To justify this position, I say that because musical instruments are used in the Old Testament, which they are, they're clearly acceptable to God in our worship today. How many people here would be able to show me from the Bible right now why that isn't a valid argument? My friends, that's something that every one of us needs to be able to do. We all need to know, for instance, that Galatians 3 teaches us that we aren't under the Law of Moses anymore. We need to know that that logically tells us that we can't use something from that law to justify instrumental music. If we aren't at the point where we can deal with questions like those, we need to grow until we are.

- F. Another big problem with prolonged spiritual immaturity is that it makes us useless in the kingdom. For instance, consider the Hebrews writer's rebuke to the spiritually immature in Hebrews 5:12-14. Milk is great for the one who has just been born again, friends, but God expects all of us to move past the milk stage, to the point where we're able to understand and be nourished by more complex parts of the word. Otherwise, we're every bit as ridiculous as a ten-year-old who is still fed by his mother's milk. If we're in that position, we are certainly not equipped to do the work that God wants us to do. For instance, Kody Troyner's a great young Christian who's already beginning to do a lot in the assembly, but at the teacher's meeting this afternoon, I don't expect to hear anyone say that Kody should teach the adult Bible class next quarter. Kody's only been a Christian for about three months now, and there's no reason why he should be ready for that kind of responsibility. On the other hand, though, what about the Christian who obeyed the gospel 20 years ago and hasn't matured enough to teach? Brethren, God wants more out of us than that.

II. Fruits of Maturity.

- A. Now that we've established how important spiritual maturity is to us, let's look at some of the fruits that the maturation process should be bearing in our lives. The first of these is **ASSEMBLING**. As we grow in Christ, our hunger for the word should naturally provoke us to go to more and more church services. Consider, for instance, what Luke tells us about the church in Jerusalem in Acts 2:41-42. They thirsted for the gospel so much that they constantly devoted themselves to hearing the teaching of the apostles. Our church meets three times a week; those brethren were so hungry for truth that they met together every day.
- B. We need to learn that same hunger for the word of God, because if we don't, we will never grow. Generally speaking, a newborn baby will want to be fed every two to four hours, yet strangely enough, there are a lot of babes in Christ who are convinced they only need to be fed once a week. Friends, that won't get the job done. I have never in my life seen a mature Christian who got that way by only coming to Sunday morning services. Let's hunger for the word, brethren, and let's satisfy that hunger by being here every time the doors are open.
- C. If we've got the assembling down, we can move on to the next step: **WORKING** for the Lord. Paul encourages us to do this in 1 Corinthians 15:58. We are not simply to work; we are to abound in that work. There are many different kinds of work in the kingdom, but this morning, I want to focus on one. The other day, I happened to be roaming around in the auditorium, and I got to looking at the teachers' matrix for this year. For our junior high, high school, and adult classes, for the entire year, that matrix lists only five men in the congregation here who are teaching classes. Basically, we have five men who are teaching an average of more than half the year, and everybody else, who is not teaching. For the classes from one year old through fifth grade, nearly half the matrix doesn't have any names in it. One of every two slots is empty.
- D. Brethren, I know it's not the easiest thing in the world to teach a Bible class. I know it's not the most praised thing in the world to teach a Bible class. But this is something that we need to do, and to remind ourselves why we need to do it, let's look around. Let's look at all the children and young people who are the students in our class program. We know them, and we love them. They're our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, gifts to us from God, and infinitely precious in His sight. Folks, they're the reason why we teach Bible classes, so that they can come to know the Lord, and love the Lord, and be forever with the Lord. Friends, our children need us. Let's not let them down. Even if we can't teach Bible classes this next quarter, let's come to the teacher's meeting at 4 this afternoon, to learn what we can do to help.
- E. If we already assemble faithfully and work regularly, we can turn our attention to **LOVING**. Consider John's thoughts on the subject in 1 John 3:18. The love of the Christian is not just something we think about; it's something we live out. It's always been interesting to me that one of the ways that I can tell a man is about ready to become an elder is not because he has the required two kids who have been dunked, but because on his own, he's already starting to act like an elder. On his own, he's looking out for the people on the margins of the church, the people who need help, and he's taking them under his wing. If we want to be elders or elders' wives someday, this is a lesson we need to learn. We need to be constantly ready and willing to express our love for our brethren in ways that no one else has remembered to do.
- F. If we're doing all of these things, we need to broaden the scope of our love by **EVANGELIZING**. Before I go on, let me make sure that folks aren't taking the order of this list too seriously. We can try to reach the lost at any stage of our spiritual development, but even if we've got everything else down, just about all of us can invest some effort in this. Consider the example of Acts 8:4. Let me tell you a little bit about the best personal worker I've ever met: a brother down in Texas named Westley Pollard. Before he came to the Lord, Westley was not what you would call a good man. However, once he obeyed the gospel, Westley's whole life changed. He currently serves as an elder at Dowlen Road, but perhaps most of all, he's never forgotten what it's like to be lost. Every year, Westley converts about a dozen people. I have quite literally seen him working the lines at the Super Wal-Mart, looking for people to study with. And yet, if you asked Westley today if he was satisfied with his spiritual development, I know he'd say he wasn't, because he's not enough like Jesus. Let's develop a love for the lost like Westley's. Better still, let's develop a love for the lost like Christ's.

Conclusion. If you're lost, know that the love of Jesus extends even to you. Come to Him today.