



Nothing brings more joy than the birth of a child. The goal a family has for a child is not just that a child is born, but it is to see the child grow to maturity and to live a productive life. There is great joy in watching the early development of a baby - the first smile, crawl, standing, walking, or their first word.

Sorrow when a baby doesn't grow normally. What is cute about a newborn is a cause for concern and sorrow if after a year the child has not developed past the newborn stage. And that is how Paul feel in our text today. At a time when these spiritual children should have shown signs of growth and maturity, he was concerned that they could not eat solid spiritual food. They were still immature and required the milk of the word.

Babies have strong desires, they want whatever they want, and they want it now. Babies serve their own desires with no thought of the consequences or the future. This is why they require constant care!

As we continue in our series on Discovering The Church, today we look at the first of three Pictures of the Church. In our text today, the church is pictured as a family and the goal is maturity. (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

In our series thus far we have defined the church as "a called out assembly of believers." Now lets enlarge on that definition just a bit.

The church is a community of faithful believers, of whom Christ Jesus is the head, called out of the world and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness of His grace and glory.

The church is first mentioned by Christ in Matthew 16:18... *"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."*

- **I** – Person = Jesus Christ Himself takes responsibility for the building of the church.
- **Will** – Promise = Jesus Christ makes a promise concerning the church that cannot be denied, a promise that will not fail.
- **Build** – Process = Jesus Christ will build the church, it is based upon the foundation of Jesus Christ himself, built up with every person who puts faith in Christ for salvation.
- **My** – Possession = It is His church! He is the owner of the church, He is the founder of the church. The church is not owned by a pastor, or a denomination or a body of people... he is the owner of the church!
- **Church** - Product = This is what Christ is building, a church in which His Spirit will dwell.
- **The gates of hell will not prevail** - Power = Religions can march against it, Satan can throw his forces at it, but the church will be triumphant. Even the gates of hell cannot withstand the advance of the church.

The reason the church exists is to reflect God's glory in the world and before the angels, and to bear witness of Him among the nations.

God's glory is reflected through God's children who have grown to spiritual maturity in their walk with Christ. It is clear in our text that it is possible to remain a spiritual infant, so how can we grow to maturity in our spiritual life?

THE CONDITION OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY (1)

Babies are immature in their development (1b).

Newborn babies are expected to be immature, but they are constantly moving toward maturity. Babies demand constant attention from their parents. You speak to babies simply and authoritatively.

A true pastor must have a servant's heart. It is his responsibility to feed the spiritual children. But the goal is there should come a time in maturity that they feed themselves and begin to feed others.

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Babies are unable to discern (1a).

Babies put everything into their mouth (2:14). At this point the saved and the unsaved can look a lot alike. Paul could not speak to them as to spiritual people - They had been saved, some of them for several years yet were still babies spiritually. Spiritually immature Christians cannot easily discern truth, what is good or bad for them. That was certainly the case in this church! They were filled with pride in their ignorance (4:18), There was immorality in the church (Ch. 5); They were misusing and misunderstanding the purpose of spiritual gifts (Ch. 12-14) and they had embraced a false teaching concerning the resurrection (Ch.15).

Babies are unable to digest meat (2a)

Word of God is our spiritual food. Consider the following descriptions of the Word of God:

Milk - *1 Pt 2:2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*

Bread - *Mt. 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'*

Meat - *Heb. 5:11-14 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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; 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. 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.*

Honey - *Ps. 119:103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

Deformity affects our diet. To drink spiritual milk is to focus on the simple things, the stories of Scripture. To eat meat is to partake of doctrines, focuses on the truths.

An immature believer knows the facts but not the truths, He lives on Bible stories, not Bible doctrines.

THE CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY (1-3a)

The two enemies of spiritual growth:

The first enemy of spiritual growth is the World.

"Worldliness is having our heart and mind shaped by the values of the world so that we engage in its sinful pleasures and pursue earthly treasures" - Doran.

Worldliness is much more than bad habits (drinking, disco), it is a way of thinking and believing. Worldliness is looking to the world for our standards, attitudes, and meaning in life. Worldliness is accepting the world's definitions, measuring sticks and goals.

The second enemy of spiritual growth is the Flesh.

Someone who is carnal or fleshly is one who serves their selfish human nature. They were controlled by their own sinful desires. They were influenced by the world.

Sit two babies on the floor together surrounded by a multitude of toys and it won't be long before they are screaming and crying because one baby is grabbing the toy that another baby is holding. This is a great illustration of our selfish human nature!

Selfishness is the best word to describe our flesh. Sin of Adam, like that of Satan, centered upon setting his own will and desires against God's. Sins of the world and of the flesh are interrelated. The Corinthians had spurned the solid food because they were worldly.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY (3b-4)

Jealousy is the attitude

Jealousy is a severe form of selfishness. It is begrudging someone else what we wish were ours i.e. Possessions, position - honor, power - authority. ILL: Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. (I Kn. 21).

Selfishness is one of the most obvious characteristics of babyhood. Jealousy and strife are always found in an immature church

A mature Christian practices selflessness.

Ro. 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

Strife is the action

When our heart is full of jealousy it will always exhibit itself in strife.

Ro. 13:13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Strife is the outward expression of selfishness. What is in the heart will come out the mouth.

Mt. 12:33“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. 34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

3. A mature Christian practices love!

I Jn. 3:23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Division is the end

Division can only occur when there is selfishness. Immaturity focuses on the teacher instead of the teaching (4) and is willing to divide and argue over the teacher rather than the truth.

James 4:1-2 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

When immature Christians, w/o spiritual discernment, get into places of leadership in the church the result is disastrous. Age is no guarantee of spiritual maturity

Mature Christian practices unity! (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 4:3)

THE CURE FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

Good food (Lk. 4:14; I Tim. 4:6-8)

The Church is a Family

Hear the Word and respond in obedience to that Word. Following Jesus happens one step at a time. You will grow no further than your last “no.”

Ps. 119:105 Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path!

Healthy exercise (Gal. 5:16-24)

Study the Word, spend time every day in prayer and meditation on what God is showing you in His Word. Practice what you are learning. In other words it is not enough just to attend a service and hear a message, or to read the Bible and then go on about your life. Spiritual exercise involves intentionally putting what you have learned into practice.

Regular rest

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

The development of children illustrates the way we are to grow spiritually. From Newborn > Child > Man > Mature > Equipped.

2 Tim. 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

How much influence do your desires have over your life? The Corinthians had not grown in faith because they were influenced by their own desires and acting like the world around them. Paul lamented, “Are you not carnal, behaving like mere men?” (3c)

God has a higher expectation for us. We are to mature into the likeness of Christ!

Ephesians 4:12-13 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, 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

The Church is a Family

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—

The church is a family! The goal in this family is spiritual maturity!

Where are you in your growth? Maybe you have been on the sidelines listening and evaluating what is being taught week after week. Your next step is to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and believe in Him.

This is called the new birth... this is where spiritual life begins! Won't you come to Jesus today for forgiveness and salvation?

Once you have been born into God's family through faith in Jesus God's goal for you as His child is maturity! It's time to go on with Christ, it's time to grow in Christ!