

Lesson 10: “God Growth – Infant to Mature” 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 Craig Crawshaw

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters are anything but God who causes the growth.

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

In chapter 2, Paul made the distinction between the “natural man” and the “spiritual man” – that is, between the Christian who is led by the Spirit, and the non-Christian who is not.

Here in chapter 3, Paul makes a further distinction between the mature Christian (a “spiritual man”) and the immature Christian (an “infant in Christ”). Just as in physical life we do not see the transition from infant to mature happen instantly, we will discover that the spiritual transition from infancy to maturity is likewise progressive.

We also must not assume that we who are believers are clearly one or the other – either infant or mature. We are all in the process of growing from infancy to maturity. This is the process called, in theological terms, sanctification – the process of becoming more like Christ. This is what Paul taught in Philippians 1:6.

Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

But we are not to understand that this growth process takes place with no impediments or “stunting of growth.” Indeed, Paul speaks here of not being able to guide the Corinthians to growth because of their being “men of flesh.” We take this to mean that although the Spirit was in them, He was being “quenched” (1 Thess. 5:19) and restricted by their relying more on the influence of the world rather than on the influence of the Spirit. That can be our downfall to unimpeded growth as well.

Our passage also makes it clear that this growth transition from infancy to maturity is all God-caused, even though He uses human servants to assist in “planting” and “watering” along the way.

So today I as your pastor want to talk about your spiritual growth. And I want you to consider the degree to which you are still in spiritual infancy, and then how you can better allow the Spirit to move you forward toward maturity. This is important stuff – so let’s settle in and hear the word of God.

By way of outline in our deliberation, let us use the following as a guide:

- 1. The characteristics of infant Christians**
- 2. The key impediment to spiritual growth**

3. God's process of maturing

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INFANT CHRISTIANS

In this passage Paul uses the metaphor of drinking spiritual “milk” rather than eating spiritual “meat.” There is one other place in Scripture that uses this same metaphor to illustrate the same principle and that is in Hebrews 6.

NOTE: We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, but one of the top candidates, other than Paul himself, is Apollos. Curious and interesting that it is Paul and Apollos that are both mentioned in our passage as being those whom the Corinthians are quarreling over being their principle spiritual leader.

We will find the Hebrews passage to be of great assistance in learning the characteristics of infant, “milk-drinking” Christians.

***Hebrews 5:11-14** Concerning [Melchizedek] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*

Characteristic #1 Christian infants are **SELECTIVE** in their hearing. Here they are called “dull of hearing.” I take this to mean they hear, but don't apply. Joanne and I used to joke about our children that they sometimes were “selective” in what they chose to hear and respond to. I suppose we all can be this way. But when we only hear what we want to hear from God's Word and ignore or dismiss the other, this will surely stunt our spiritual growth, if not derail it. We love one part of God's word and disagree or dismiss another. Do you embrace the “whole council” of God as truth and your guidebook for life?

Characteristic #2 Christian infants are **STAGNANT**. Verse 12 says that they should become teachers and not just stay as students. They should be passing on their spiritual wisdom, not just taking it in. But many are just reading the Bible some, going to church some and yet not passing on what they have learned to others. You may not become an official teacher of a bible study, but you can certainly be a teacher and mentor and example to others of what God has taught you. “Do what I say, not what I do” doesn't cut it as an example. Amy Grant popularized a song years ago called “Fat Baby” which talked of a Christian who was proud of all he/she learned and knew but didn't live the life style of a mature Christian. The Word was read but not applied. The mouth gave forth curses and criticisms as much as praises. Quarrels and envy and jealousy were the norm. Trouble and worry followed like a cloud.

A maturing Christian must move from milk to meat, from student to teacher/example, from debilitating trouble to triumph through trouble. Not stagnant but moving onward and upward in Christ-likeness. Is this you?

Characteristic #3 Christian infants are **SUSCEPTABLE**. The Hebrews writer says, “*solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*” Mature Christians are discerning of what is right and wrong. Infant Christians still make a lot of mistakes and probably don't even realize why. Mature Christians don't believe everything they hear or see as “right” – they are not easily fooled. Infant Christians are

gullible, often making a poor choice because they can't easily discern right from wrong. Are you discerning and wise in regard to what is of God and what is not?

THE KEY IMPEDIMENT TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Back in our 1 Corinthians passage Paul says “jealousy and strife” are signals that the Corinthians are fleshly (infants) and not walking by the Spirit. When we are always wanting something more than what we have (jealousy) and feeling “tied up in knots” often causing strife around us, it is clear we are not CONTENT. I suggest that lack of CONTENTMENT is the key impediment to spiritual growth, and conversely that CONTENTMENT in whatever situation we find ourselves is the key to God growing us toward maturity. I reference two Scriptures in my defense.

Philippians 4:11b-13 *I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

It is clear that Paul had learned the secret of contentment, and thus learned the secret of spiritual maturity. It was that He could be fully content in knowing that He and Christ could handle anything, for the Almighty Jesus was His strength in all circumstances. Have we learned, or are learning, this critical lesson?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul had been allowed a physical torment by God – he called it a “thorn in the flesh.” He implored God three times to remove it. But God did not. Rather God said to Paul:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (verses 9-10)

Do you see that word “content” pop up here once again? Despite his “thorn in the flesh” and God’s answer of “No, but my grace is sufficient,” Paul was content with his difficulties, knowing God was making him stronger (maturing him) through them. Wow – is that me? – is that you? **Contentment in all** – trusting God completely – was certainly Paul’s key to spiritual maturity, and it will be for you and for me.

GOD’S PROCESS OF MATURING

Our final outline point to consider is the process by which we mature. For this Paul uses two different metaphors. In next week’s passage, verses 10-15, the metaphor is “God’s building” and the foundation (key word for this chapter) must be Jesus Christ (verse 11). In today’s passage, verse 5-9, the metaphor is “God’s field,” and maturity takes both proper planting and watering. Paul makes it clear that both the planting and watering aid the growth (maturity), but it is God who causes the growth (verse 7).

Who are the “planters” in your Christian life? I have a handful of pastors, teachers and friends who were that to me – the ones who shared with me the gospel of salvation in Jesus and helped me come to become a sturdy “seedling” of a baby Christian. The foundation of this planting had to be the solid foundation of Jesus Christ and Him alone – dying to pay the

price for my sin, rising from the grave to confirm His deity and paving my way to heaven and ascending to the Father to take His place as my heavenly Advocate. I trust this is your foundation as well, but that only makes you a “seedling” or infant Christian.

Now if impediments to growth are kept to a minimum, and TRUST and CONTENTMENT flourish, along with a healthy dose of Bible study and application, I am sure to mature properly. And this will happen with the aid of those who WATER the seed in me which was planted.

Who are the “waterers” in your Christian life? There should be many of them. Pastor David and myself are probably a couple of them, but you should be able to mention others that you look to for spiritual guidance and “watering” – whether they be family, friends, writers of commentaries or devotionals, TV preachers or other influential spiritual counselors along your journey. We must be discerners of truth, not believing everything we hear (as we learned from Hebrews), but hearing and applying truth, step by step to a greater spiritual maturity.

I believe this watering can be “general” in the sense that we don’t choose what lessons we learn until they come our way – we just learn and grow as we go. But, I also believe that this watering can be “specific” – meaning we consciously work with God on certain areas of our life that we know need pruning and refining. It is when we let God into these secret corners of our life that he begins to infiltrate more and more of us. “Out with the old, and in with the new.” He prunes away this little habit, and refines this spiritual weakness, and before we know it we are ready for the next lesson in maturity.

Is this your experience in maturing? Or are you just “going along for the spiritual ride” without any particular area of life in mind to submit to God’s watering? I submit that the more you actively release areas of your life for God to conform to the image of Christ, the faster you will mature. And the more you find contentment in your circumstances, whatever the world might be throwing you, the more you will mature.

And the more you realize that it is God alone who truly produces the growth in maturity, and don’t look to a “planter” or “waterer” or pastor or friend to produce the growth, the faster and stronger you will mature. Remember, “waiting on God” is not sitting idly waiting for Him to perform – it is partnering with Him by yielding, submitting, studying, ministering, loving, forgiving and working hard to allow your life to reflect the person of Jesus as much as possible – all with God’s strength, of course.

REMINDERS

- Infant Christians are SELECTIVE (dull of hearing), STAGNANT (not sharing what they have learned) and SUCCEPTABLE (not good at discerning right from wrong). Don’t be this way!
- The key impediment to spiritual maturity is lack of CONTENTMENT (jealousy and strife). Learn the key to maturity in finding CONTENTMENT in the grace of Jesus through every situation.
- God’s process of maturing you includes PLANTING (a firm seedling of knowing and affirming the basic doctrines of your faith), WATERING (working hand in hand with God, through positive examples God puts in your life, to grow into the image of Jesus).

KNOW Jesus, GROW in Jesus, and then GO in ministry to tell others about Jesus!