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“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” I Corinthians 1:10.

The Problem of Spiritual Immaturity

Lesson Aim: To aid believers in spiritual growth by showing the tragedy of arrested development.

L133. Date: March 1975. **Text:** I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-9.

Topic: Growth (Spiritual): Lack of; Knowledge: Lack of.

Is there any joy quite like the joy at the birth of a new baby? Mother is misty-eyed. Father is proud. Friends are filled with congratulations and best wishes. Even Jesus spoke of a mother's joy at the birth of her son: **“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world,”** John 16:21.

Almost equal to the joy of birth is the heartbreak which follows, if the child suffers from retarded development. If normal growth does not come, the loved ones suffer. It is not unusual for joy to turn into heaviness when parents realize that the potential of the infant is limited.

In the physical realm, we are aware of many cases where growth did not follow birth. Do we realize that the same can happen in the spiritual area of life?

A person may be born of God and yet fail to grow to spiritual maturity. Spiritual development is even more important than physical development. No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote the churches of Galatia that he suffered the travail of birth pangs because of their evident lack of spiritual growth. It is tragic when spiritual growth does not follow spiritual birth. Today's lesson aims to aid you to grow spiritually by helping you to realize the tragedy of arrested development.

I. JOY OF NEW LIFE

The spiritual life, just as the physical life, begins with a birth. Having borne testimony that Jesus came to His own creation and His own people, did not receive Him, John explained how many did receive Him. “They were BORN,” John explained, “not of human parentage nor from an impulse of the flesh, nor the will of a human father, but were born of God.” (See John 1:11-13.) Jesus testified, **“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . .Ye must be born again.”** John 3:3, 7.

Over and again, the Scripture speaks of believers' being “begotten” of God (I Peter 1:3; I John 5:1, 18). **“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth . . .”** James 1:18. It is for that reason that the saved call God their Father and consider themselves His children. Christians have been born of God.

Spiritual birth brings joy just as physical birth does. Consider the occasion when Philip preached Christ in Samaria. The people believed the message, trusted Jesus, **“And there was great joy in the city,”** Acts 8:8. Jesus declared there was joy both upon earth and in heaven when a lost sheep is found and when a lost son returns home (Luke 15:7, 10). Remember the joy you experienced upon your conversion and the joy you have shared with others as they trusted Jesus, too.

Birth is the beginning, not the climax, of life. Growth opens the possibilities for so many things as the life matures and moves toward its potential. The principle is true in both the physical and spiritual realm.

Spiritual growth is imperative. God commands you to **“. . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . .”** II Peter 3:18. The writer of Hebrews said, **“therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection . . .”** 6:1. (Do not be content to remain with “first principles” but move on to maturity.) The purpose of God is that each of His believing children may grow up into the likeness of Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

How can the believer grow? (1) He must have a proper diet: **“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,”** I Peter 2:2. (2) He must have exercise: **“. . . Ye ought to be teachers. . .”** Hebrews 5:12. **“. . . Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves,”** James 1:22. (3) He must add virtue to virtue: “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly

kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity,” II Peter 1:5, 7. You can grow, if you desire.

Your salvation experience was but the beginning of your new life in Christ. Robert Oldenburg expressed the idea exactly in the words of a beautiful song: “Life had only begun when I gave Him my heart. Twas the dawn of the day, it was only the start. God's law was satisfied by His Son crucified. I was saved, was reborn in my heart. But there's more, so much more than that first sweet day; More, so much more every passing day. For the life I now live God is living through me in each word, in each deed, each day.” Amen!

II. SIGNS OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

When an infant does not develop properly, certain telltale signs indicate it. One member of the body does not grow in proportion to other members. One member does not perform the ministry it is assigned in the bodily function. Gradually the body loses its proper proportion. Arrested development is indicated.

In like manner, when Christians do not develop properly, certain telltale signs indicate spiritual deformity. The lesson text indicates three such signs of spiritual immaturity. Examine your life for any indications of them.

(1) Union with Christ is ignored by the spiritually immature. Paul besought the immature Corinthian Christians that they “all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions” so that they would be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” verse 10. Jesus underscored our mutual union with Him. We are joined to Him as the branches are joined to the vine. We are joined to Him as the members are joined to the body. We are joined to Him as the children are joined to the parents in a family. Neglect in maintaining that union is an indication of arrested spiritual development, resulting in spiritual immaturity.

(2) Emphasis upon differences between brethren is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Why should there be “contentions among you” as if Christ were divided? (Read 1:10-13.) The Corinthian Christians were divided over preachers as if the preachers were divided among themselves. Our union is not that we like the same preacher, but that we are joined to the same Christ. Preacher factions indicate immaturity.

(3) Triumph of the carnal nature indicates spiritual immaturity. What is the sign of carnality? The Apostle Paul answered, “. . . **Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**” 3:3. Be honest before God and take a personal inventory. A

“carnal” believer is one who lives according to the desires of the flesh instead of the direction of the Holy Spirit. The more spiritually mature a person is, the more he submits to the control of the Holy Spirit. **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit,”** Galatians 5:25.

Oh, dear Christian, keep on growing. There never comes a time when one has reached such absolute spiritual maturity that there is no further possibility for growth. Watch your spiritual diet as carefully as you watch your physical diet. Exercise your spiritual nature by service for the Lord. Keep on seeking to be more nearly like Jesus. Keep on growing.

III. TRAGEDY OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

The tragedy of arrested spiritual growth is as great, or even greater, than the tragedy of arrested physical growth. It reveals our evaluation as to what is really important that many “parents will spend every dollar they can get to remedy physical retardation, but purposefully keep their children from church and Bible study without realizing they are causing spiritual retardation.

Spiritual immaturity is a tragedy because it causes an unnatural division of the body of Christ (verse 13). The apostle asked a series of rhetorical questions: “Christ is not divided, is He? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? You were not baptized in the name of Paul, were you?” If the answer to those questions is “No,” which it certainly must be, why the division of the body of Christ over preachers? Spiritual immaturity always divides the body. Beware!

Spiritual immaturity is a tragedy because it places an improper and unnecessary emphasis upon man. **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed . . . So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase,”** 3:5, 7. Please, do not put a preacher before the Lord. When factions arise in a church, because immature Christians divide over favorite preachers, it indicates that more importance is put upon the man than upon the Master. That is a double tragedy. It dishonors the man and denies the Lord. Spiritual immaturity is a tragedy because it creates an inability to receive spiritual food. Every parent knows how carefully the diet of an infant must be regulated. What motherly concern is manifested in providing the infant child with just the foods his system can receive and digest. Very slowly the child is given solid foods until he can eat what others eat.

In like manner, spiritually immature believers cannot receive the “meat” of the word. **“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for**

hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal . . .” 3 :2, 3. There is the reason why some church members get “spiritual indigestion” at the teaching of stewardship or other Bible doctrine. That is why some must be taught the basic doctrines of the faith over and over, even years after their conversion. They have not grown to spiritual adulthood. What a tragedy.

Spiritual immaturity is a tragedy because it places an untrue division among brethren. The Corinthian Christians were fussing over their favorite preachers as if those preachers were fussing among themselves. Paul wrote that he had planted and Apollos had watered. Then he announced, “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything. The only important one is God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are working as a team, for the same end. There is no division between them.” Do not break fellowship over a preference for preachers; the preachers are in fellowship with each other (or they should be). Think of instances where factions have divided a church. Do you see any of the four things mentioned above reflected in the cases you know? If so, you can recognize those factions as indications of spiritual immaturity. Be sure you are not a party to such factions.

IV. REMEDY FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

Is it possible that spiritual immaturity may be overcome? Yes, it is possible, but it is also difficult. Consider the following guidelines, and add others which may come to mind. Maintain a desire for spiritual maturity. Jesus said that only those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” could expect to be “filled,” Matthew 5:6. No wonder the Apostle Peter admonished Christians to desire—crave, thirst for, earnestly desire—the “milk of the Word” in order to experience growth (I Peter 2:2). There can be no spiritual maturity apart from the Word of God.

Keep your attention centered upon Jesus. The goal is to “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ,” Ephesians 4:15. Do not live under morbid self-examination. Keep your eyes upon Him. “. . . **We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord,**” II Corinthians 3:18.

Exercise regularly in various types of Christian service. Hebrews 5:14 declares that only “by reason of use” (“trained by practice”) can our mental and spiritual faculties know good from evil and do the work of God. As a child learns to walk by trial and error, so the Christian learns how to serve

God by actual experience. A person could study for years the technique of driving a car, but until he actually sat behind a wheel and put into practice what he learned, he would not be a driver. Never be content with a mere study of Christian doctrine and practice. **“Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have,”** II Corinthians 8:11. **“. . . Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves,”** James 1:22.

The problem of spiritual immaturity is that it robs the believer of the joy of his Christian life and robs God of the glory which is due Him in each of His children.

Make a list of those factors which limit or prohibit spiritual growth. Make another list of those factors which promote spiritual growth. Examine your life to see whether items on either list are evident in you. Resolve that you will be done with the former and cultivate the latter so as to become all that God intended you to be when He saved you.

It is not too late for you. You can still grow toward real spiritual maturity and know increasing joy in the Lord. Resolve to begin today!

Questions

1. What is spiritual immaturity?
2. Why is spiritual immaturity a tragedy?
3. Why is spiritual growth necessary?
4. What are the signs of arrested spiritual development?
5. Who is a “carnal” believer?
6. What does I Peter 2:2 mean?
7. What things hinder spiritual growth?
8. What things encourage spiritual growth?
9. How can you become a more mature Christian?