

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 18:6:2006

Reading: 1 John 2:1-14

BACK TO BASICS

5. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The story is told of a poor woman who was trudging wearily through the driving rain, and the icy wind, who came at last to the big house to which she was heading. When the door opened to her she found a great blazing fire in the grate. On the door re-closing she sat down on the mat inside, completely worn and soaked through. “ *Get up,*” the people said, “ *come to the fire and get dry and warm.*” “ *No,*” she replied “ *don’t disturb me, I’m quite content to remain here.*”

Now that you are a Christian are you content to stay on the mat ? The psalmist in (Ps 84:10) says, “ *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*” Or as another translation put it, “ *I would rather be just inside the door.*” Of course, its better to be just inside the door, than to be left outside, but why stick there and miss all the blessings open to those who go further and further in the Christian life. The old hymn puts it like this,

***“ More and more, more and more
Still there’s more to follow,
Have you on the Lord believed
Still there’s more to follow.”***

You see, the Christian life is intended to be one of constant growth, progress, and maturity ! The New Testament is full of this idea of progress ! Do you recall what the book of Hebrews says ? “ *Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.*” (6:1) Paul in the book of Colossians says this, “ *As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him.*” There, by the three fold variety of the metaphor, Paul impresses upon us, the importance of spiritual growth. He likens it to the progress of a walk, the progress of a tree, the progress of a house. And now here is John, by the means of yet another illustration, pointing out the same salutary lesson, for he speaks of those who have grown in spiritual stature to be “ ***fathers,***” some are spiritually vigorous “ ***young men,***” and some for all their physical age are still “ ***little children,***” in grace. You see, we are all at different stages of spiritual development, yet if we are God’s children, all of have us have experienced forgiven sin.

Do you see what John says in (2:12) “ *My little children*” Literally, this word means “ *born ones.*” All Christians have been born into God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ, and their sins have been forgiven. Did you notice the basis of this forgiveness ? They are forgiven “ *for His name’s sake.*” ***The name of Jesus Christ makes the difference between guilt and grace.*** But then, birth is only the beginning of life is it not ? For if birth is normal we can expect growth.

Now there are three stages of growth. Indeed John identifies three levels of maturity which correspond to the basic three levels of physical maturity, there are children, young people and adults. Someone has said that a child is immature, a young person is inexperienced, and an adult is incredible. Now I want to talk to you this on “ **Spiritual Growth,**” by looking at this three different groups. John begins with spiritual fathers, talks about spiritual young men, and ends with spiritual children. I am going to reverse the process and begin with,

(1) SPIRITUAL INFANCY

Do you see what John says in (2:13) “ *I write unto you little children because ye have known the Father.*” Now again notice the phrase “ *little children.*” Now John uses a different word here. In (2:12) he uses the term to describe all the children of God, but here he restricts it to those who have just been “ *born again,*” or to those who have not grown in grace since the day of their salvation. He is talking about those who are spiritually immature. When I came to the Lord Jesus at the age of nine, I did not know much about salvation. I did not even begin to understand what was involved in my salvation experience. If you had said to me, “ *Explain the doctrine of repentance,*” I could not have done it. If you had said, “ *Give me a definition of saving faith,*” I could not. I had received Jesus Christ as my Saviour and that is all I knew. ***Spiritual Infancy !*** Is that stage you are at ? Despite the fact that you’ve been a long time saved ! Are you still spiritually immature ? You know, when you think of a baby, you think of,

(a) The PERSON a Baby gets to Know:

Do you see what John says in (2:13) ? The smallest child soon gets to know its father, in fact the words “ *daddy,*” or “ *papa,*” are among the first words a child learns to speak. And the first lesson, the Holy Spirit teaches a new Christian is that he has come to a Father. He has not come to a stern and austere Judge, as many think of God before we know Him in Christ. And certainly he has not come to a senile, sentimental Grandfather who gives him anything he wants. But he learns that he has come under the affection of a strong, tender, true Father with a father’s heart. Is it not beautiful the way Paul puts it ? He says, “ *God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba Father.*” (Gal 4:6) That’s a baby word for his father ...Abba, even baby lips say it. It’s the equivalent of “ *Da Da.*” My we are not living in a cold, mechanical universe, clanking on its relentless way, and we but helpless victims of inscrutable forces which grind us up in the machinery of life. No ! We are in the hands of a Father, a Father who knows and loves us, who has an intense concern for our development. A Father who has numbered the very hairs of our head, and without whom not even a sparrow falls to the ground. A Father who is aware of our deepest needs and is abundantly able to provide them. That is the One we have come to know ! “ *I write unto you little children because ye have known the father.*” (2:13) (a) But what about,

(b) The PROVISION a Baby needs to Have:

How do you help babies grow? Well, a baby,

1. Must have FOOD:

Some of the saddest things we have seen are pictures of babies starving to death because of malnutrition. Is it not the same in the spiritual realm ? Peter says, “ *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.* ” (2:2) A Christian baby must have spiritual food, we have got to feed them the Word of God. My if you are a new Christian, the most important habit you can form in your life is to begin daily, diligently and discerningly to study the Word of God. Start with the “ *milk,* ” of the Word and not the “ *meat,* ” of the Word. You see, you don’t come home and say, “ *All right now kids, get up to the table we’re serving T bone steaks for dinner.* ” You begin with milk, and then cereal, then when teeth are formed something more solid.

1.

2. Must have AIR:

The air of the spiritual baby is prayer, talking to the Lord. Just as we need oxygen in order to live, so we need communication with our Heavenly Father.

3. Must have EXERCISE:

Is this not also true in the spiritual realm ? My If you are going to grow as a believer you need to start doing something for God. Get some tracts and start passing them out. Knock on doors. Do something for Christ !

4. Must have LOVE:

You would not a bring a baby home, and put him out on the garden and say, “ *All right, do the best you can. We are not going to bring you into the warmth of the home. We are going to let you fend for yourself out there and if it gets cold, that’s just too bad.* ” Would you treat a baby like that ? Yet is that the way we are treating spiritual babies ? How do we treat the new Christian in this church ? Do we gave them love, understanding, friendliness ? When you think of a baby, you think of (a) (b) and the,

(c) The PROBLEM a baby needs to Avoid:

What is that ? Stunted growth ! Wouldn’t it be a sight if you went to a maternity ward in one of our hospitals, and there a nurse is sitting in a rocking chair and in her arms is a forty year old man with his thumb in his mouth. You ask, “ *Who is that ?* ” *This is a baby who was born her forty years ago and he liked it so well, he decided to stay.* ” You see, there is nothing wrong with **being** a baby, but there is plenty wrong with **staying** a baby. *We are to be childlike but we are not to be childish.* Was this not the problem in Corinth ? Here were a people who claimed to be spiritual, to have all kinds of spiritual gifts, yet they were the worldliest crowd in the N.T. When Paul wrote to them he said, “ *I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.* ” (1 Cor 3:1) Spiritual babies, whose growth was stunted. Is this the stage you’re at ? Maybe you are just a new Christian ! Or perhaps you’ve been saved for years

but are you still in spiritual infancy ? Have you never grown up ? Are you still a little child spiritually ? (1)

(2) SPIRITUAL ADOLESCENCE

For in (2:14) John talks about “ *young men*,” what I call spiritual adolescence ! These are believers who have moved from the bottle to the battle, from wetting to winning. John speaks here about their power. He says,

“ *I have written unto you young men*,” (2:13) Notice, that this,

(a) POWER IS DESCRIBED:

The aged apostle admired the “ *young men*,” he had gathered around him and he said, “ *ye are strong*.” That is the glory of young men. The book of Proverbs says,

“ *the glory of young men is their strength*.” (20:29) That was the glory of Samson. He could rend a lion, take on a whole army, carry away a city’s gates. He was strong ! We admire his strength but he never learned to subdue his lusts. Still, in the end he triumphed gloriously and his name rings in history to this day ! The word used for “ *strong*,” here (*ischuros*) which relates to physical strength, focuses on the young men’s spiritual strength as indicated by the context ! My throughout history God has had his strong young men. *Martin Luther* was 27 years of age when he marched down the stairs of the Scala Sancta in Rome, realising that salvation was by faith not by works. He was 34 when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of that Wittenburg Church. *George Muller* was 27 when he moved to Bristol, sure that God wanted him to open an orphanage strictly on the basis of faith.

John Bunyan was 32 when he was jailed for preaching without permission of the established church. In prison he wrote his immortal *Pilgrims Progress*. *William Booth* was 36 when he founded the Salvation Army. He threw himself into the dens of London’s East End to “ *rescue the perishing*.” *David Brainard* was 25 when he set out to convert the American Indians. He was only 29 when he died. *William Carey* was still in his teens when he could read the Bible in six languages. He was 32 when he went to India and launched the modern missionary era. My are you strong ? Some of you are running, jogging, and pumping iron, yet spiritually are you a weakling ? (a)

(b) POWER IS DERIVED:

“ *And the Word of God abideth in you*,” (2:14) John’s young men were not taken in by the cultic errors being peddled around Ephesus by Satan’s emissaries. They knew how to wield “ *the sword of the Spirit*,” exposing the subtle lies of the enemy ! The word for

“ *abide*,” means to “ *live with or to take up residence with*.” My the Word of God must live with you and you must live with it if you are going to grow as a Christian. Do you want to be filled with the Spirit ? Do you want to know the Lord ? Then you must saturate with the Word. Dr. R.A. Torrey said this, “ *You may talk about power but if you neglect the one book, that God has given you, the one instrument through which he imparts and exercises His power you will not*

have it.

99 Christians in every 100 are merely playing at Bible study, and therefore 99 Christians in every 100 are mere weaklings when they might be giants both in their Christian life and service.” Does God’s Word abide in you ? (a) (b)

(c) *POWER IS DISPLAYED:*

“ *And ye have overcome the wicked one,*” this refers to Satan as the supreme author of wickedness in this universe. (Matt 6:13) The Greek word for

“ *overcome,*” means “ *victory.*” Spiritual victory, spiritual success is conquering the wicked one. How do you do it ? Let the Word of God abide in you ! Is this not what Christ did ? Do you recall that on three occasions the devil came to Him, tempting Him ? Each time the devil made his attack, the Lord Jesus dipped into His heart, where the Word of God was abiding and said, “ *It is written, it is written, it is written.*” (Matt 4:4,7,10) Are you having daily victory over the devil, because the Word of God is abiding in you ? (1) (2)

(3) SPIRITUAL MATURITY

For John speaks of “ *fathers.*” Isn’t it good to have

“ *fathers day ?*” I heard about a father whose 2 children talked their mother into letting them get a hamster. She agreed to let them have it as long as they agreed to take care of it. They got the hamster and named him

“ *Danny,*” but the children did not take care of it so the mother found a new home for the hamster. When the children came home she told them that she had a new home for Danny. The children took the news better than she thought. She had expected them to cry and beg to keep the hamster. Instead they just sat there and said very little. One of them said, “ *But Mum, we will miss him.*” “ *Yes we will,*” said the mother *but he is too much work for one person and since I am that person he has to go.*” The other child said, “ *Maybe if he didn’t eat so much and be as messy we could him.*” The Mother was firm and said, “ *Its time to take Danny to his new home, go and get the cage.*” When she that, the children went hysteric, “ *Danny,*” we thought you said, “ ***Daddy.***” Have you ever felt that the kids would rather gave up you, than the family pet ? Well, John speaking here about “ *fathers.*” It may be that these “ *fathers,*” were elders in the church. They were the most mature, not in age, but in their spiritual experience of God. For John says, “ *Ye have known Him that is from the beginning.*” You see, one of the marks of spiritual maturity is that you have grown in your knowledge of the Lord.

Do you know the Lord more intimately than you used to ? Do you know Christ better now than when you were saved ? Elders, fathers, do you realise that the pinnacle of spiritual maturity is to know God experimentally ? In his letter to the Corinthians Paul shows us some things a parent is capable of doing. Look at (1 Cor 4:14-16) You see, a “ *spiritual father,*” is capable of three things.

(a) *PROCREATION:*

He can reproduce himself. You see, a person is not spiritually full grown until he has reproduced himself and has brought another child into the family of God. *How many physical fathers do you have ? One ! How many spiritual fathers ? One !* Think of the man or woman, or young person who led you to Christ ! That person is your spiritual parent. Paul called Timothy “ *My own son in the faith.* ” (1 Tim 1:2) Paul was Timothy’s spiritual father and Timothy was Paul’s spiritual son. My are you a spiritual parent ? I have some spiritual sons who are older than I am chronologically, but younger than I am in the Lord ! Is this not what the Lord wants you to do ? Is this not why God has saved you ? To reproduce, to bring forth spiritual babies if you please. A church, if it is the kind of church it ought to be must be vitally concerned with spiritual obstetrics !

It must be interested into birthing children into God’s family. Now there is one way a church is going to experience this, and its what Isaiah said, “ *As soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children.* ” (66:8) Are we bringing forth spiritual children ? (a)

(b) CONFRONTATION:

Paul says, “ *I write not these things to shame but as my beloved sons I warn you.* ” (4:14) The word “ *warn,* ” means “ *to speak to the heart of.* ” It has the idea of confronting the human heart with the Word of God. Is this not one of the things a father does with his children ? He confronts their behaviour with the truth. Even so, a spiritual parent is responsible to confront those whom he has won to Christ, to lead and guide them, to speak the truth in love and help them grow.

(c) ILLUSTRATION:

For Paul says, “ *Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.* ” (4:16) You see, a father has a wonderful opportunity of providing for his children an illustration of what life really ought to be. Several years ago a man was walking out behind his house, and he saw his oldest boy, just old enough to begin to follow his Daddy everywhere he went. *He noticed that as he was walking, taking rather long strides, the little fellow behind was trying his best to put his little feet, in the imprint of his Daddy’s big feet.* Like a light it hit that man’s soul, “ ***where are your steps leading that boy.*** ” The Lord used that to bring conviction to his soul and he was gloriously saved. He had suddenly realised that his life was an illustration.

*You’re writing a gospel, a chapter each day
By deeds that you do, by words that you say
Others read what you write, whether faithless or true
Say, what is the gospel according to you ?*

Spiritual Infancy ! Spiritual Adolescence ! Spiritual Maturity ! Which stage are you at ? Do you want to be an immature Christian all your life, a problem to others, needing to be helped along with this crutch or that crutch ? Or are you earnestly desirous to be a strong, mature, fully, God-dependent man or woman, able to walk through life and face its problems without being overthrown ? *Is this not what God calls us to ?* And the instrument that is given to us is the Word

of God in the hands of the Spirit of God. Without it, there will be no spiritual growth!