

Perpetual *Spiritual* Infancy

The birth of a child is a blessed event. It brings such joy and happiness... and responsibility. As new parents, and perhaps for the first time in our lives, we learn what it means to give unconditional love. Probably also for the first time in our lives, we feel the awesome responsibility of what it means to have someone else be completely and totally dependent upon us. This tremendous onus causes some parents to become obsessively compulsive about matters of nutrition, cleanliness, health, and the overall general care of the child. Thus, the doctors are barraged with phone calls, visits, and questions about every tendency and trait of the child, whether real or imagined. Constant comparisons are made to other children with regard to growth-chart percentiles and other developmental abilities. In short, anything and everything is at least considered if not tried or done that could possibly provide any advantage for growth and development for this new "bundle of joy!" But let's think about some of these things in a spiritual connotation.

Being "*born again*" (John 3:3,5) on the basis of faith and through the waters of baptism is the process by which one becomes a "*new creature*" (2Corinthians 5:17), or "*newborn babe*" (1Peter 2:2), in Christ. In many ways, ***spiritual growth and development parallels its physical counterpart.*** ***Spiritual growth requires attention to and effort toward: nutrition, 1Peter 2:1-2; rest, Philippians 4:6-7; cleanliness, 2Peter 2:20; and exercise, 2Peter 1:5-8.*** While these things may need to be a lesson unto themselves, they are not the direct focus of our attention here. Instead, please consider...

What happens when a *physical* child doesn't grow, develop, and mature according the normal order? There is immediate concern, investigation as to the preventative cause, and corrective and additional assistive steps are implemented. **But what happens when a *spiritual babe* in Christ does not grow, develop, and mature? Is there a parallel level of concern, investigation, and assistance given?** Sadly, such is usually not the case. **Spiritual** family members (fellow church members), parents (those who taught and brought them forth by the gospel), and grandparents (church leaders) are typically not nearly as concerned about growth, development, and maturity as physical parents, despite the eternal consequences which are implied by the deficiency. Thus, "Maybe he will grow eventually" becomes the sad response to the situation. Why does this lamentable circumstance exist?

Perhaps there is one overlooked or unrealized key truth to these matters: **We fail to recognize that one cannot continue to live in a state of perpetual infancy.** As a physical child that for whatever reason fails to grow will die, so too a spiritual child will perish that fails to develop beyond infancy. **One just cannot remain a babe, or child, perpetually- *physically* or *spiritually!*** How we fail to grasp this point in the spiritual realm while so clearly comprehending it in the physical one is a mystery. Doesn't the Parable of the Sower clearly teach this lesson in Matthew 13:21? The *young plant* that sprouted in the *rocky soil* had "*no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.*" Having "*no firm root*" is surely an indication of a lack of growth and development that seals its fate. But please remember, this part of the parable is not about dying "plants"- but dying *disciples* who fail to grow and mature!

Let's extrapolate these things to one more point: Churches composed of perpetual spiritual infants will suffer the same tragic fate as its individual members. Why is this so? It is the *spiritually mature* who *reproduce!* Spiritual infants are not sufficiently developed, obviously, to reproduce. Thus, churches will not- and in fact cannot, survive in a state of perpetual infancy. A congregation that does not *grow, develop, mature, and reproduce* will die.

I fear that we, generally speaking, have become all too comfortable with the notion of perpetual spiritual infancy. If so, whether sooner or later, spiritual death is inevitable. However, the good news is that it doesn't *have* to be this way; we *can*, and ***must think*** and ***do*** better! So, let's take seriously the task of *raising* and *rearing* babes in Christ to spiritual maturity for their ultimate good, and the long-term good of the Cause of Christ! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)