

“Spiritual Adults”
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Opening Prayer

Good morning, and welcome back to worship. For those of you here with us in person, a special welcome to you... it feels good to preach and speak towards someone instead of just looking at a camera. For those of you worshiping from home or out in the parking lot, know that you are still very much in our thoughts and prayers, and that you too are very valued. This morning we return to our sermon series on 1st Corinthians. We are going to be in this book likely up until February 17th, when we will then move into Lent. There is no way we will get through the entire book in that time, but we will get a great start, and hopefully you will have read through this book on your own by the time we do reach Lent. Last week we talked a bit about how we must rely upon the Lord as Paul teaches us out of 1st Corinthians 2. I had mentioned that God had led me away from a more fire and brimstone-esque sermon this previous Sunday... but this week it is different. Please remember on the front end that while this sermon may speak to your particular failings, everything is spoken out of love because I (and your church, and most importantly your Lord) want you to succeed as a Christian. Chapter three of 1st Corinthians speaks to the direct heart of why many of us struggle in our faiths. While there is a lot to learn out of this chapter, our major focus is going to be on the first eleven verses and on how we are called to move from milk to meat. We are called to grow into spiritual adults Beloved, something that not many can claim.

The beginning of 1st Cor. 3 starts off with “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?” The Corinthian church was begun by the Apostle Paul, and while there were many young Christians in its midst, the reason Paul writes this letter to them is to scold them and prompt them to grow. They were given over to divisions of every kind, giving in to temptations, and instead of being focused on Christ they were very much focused on themselves. They were not growing in their faith, and their foundation was moving from being Jesus to being on other things as their focus changed. Because they were so spiritually inept (even though they were believers!), he had to repeat to them again the very basics of the faith. He could not speak to them as spiritual adults, because they were in fact not spiritual adults, but instead they were continuing to act like Christian babies. The evidence that these people were not growing? They continued to walk in strife, in jealousy, in fleshly lusts, etc. Even though at this point they had been believers for some years, they had not seriously grown. Beloved, to be honest the same criticism applies to many of us, to many of you.

To speak plainly, many of us are spiritual babies when we should be adults. Many of you are still in need of milk instead of meat, even though you have believed for decades. Paul tells the

Corinthians that “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.” What is your foundation laid upon Beloved? It is important that your faith is nurtured and made solid, because it will be tested. For the Corinthians their faith had stalled, and they were not growing. Many of you are the same. You do not know your Bibles, you don’t value your relationship with your Lord like you should, and your actions show that you are spiritually immature. Don’t get me wrong, our churches are wonderful, and I love each of you, but as your minister I wouldn’t be living out my calling if I didn’t tell you the truth. The proof is in the pudding. When you talk poorly about other believers and church members, when you are more concerned about what a politician is doing than what God is doing, when you don’t read your Bibles, when you do not take the time to be involved in your church, when you don’t pray with your family, when you cannot even articulate why you are a Christian in the first place, etc., then you show that the foundation you are building upon Christ’s blood is weak and immature. You are at risk for falling away and being led astray. Are you a better Christian now than you were five years ago? Are you closer with the Lord, have you grown in your knowledge of Him, in the last year? These are important questions to ask yourself. For the Corinthians, their faith had stagnated, and perhaps it has for you.

Let me be clear, by the way, this sort of scolding is not directed at those who are new to the faith. Those of you who are newer, you are just figuring it out... keep growing! This also is not meant for those of you who are actively growing in your faith but are not perfect. If you are actively reading your Bible, taking action against the sin in your life, praying earnestly and constantly, active in helping your church and other believers, etc. but you are still imperfect and occasionally fail, then you are no different from the Apostle Paul himself. What the focus on here, what 1st Corinthians 3 is trying to root out, is those of us who should be growing in Christ but are not. If you have a stagnant faith and are not growing, then the truth is twofold. You are likely dying in your faith and you are deceiving yourself if you think you are living a solid Christian life. You were made for so much more, Beloved, than just passively being a believer. You were made to change eternity for the better. As we mentioned last week, you are not responsible for the outcome of your faithful actions, but you are responsible for acting faithfully. If God has given you a gift and you do not use it for His kingdom, that is on you. If you faithfully act and take steps, but it doesn’t work out how you would have hoped (looking at some of you small group/Sunday School/etc. leaders) then you have done your part and your faith is not stagnant. Again the results of a growing Christian, a maturing Christian are clear, but so too are the results of putting your faith on life support. Our second reading, just as our first, talks about another all too common occurrence within our churches.

In Hebrews 5 we read “Concerning him 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.” The people that are being spoken to in Hebrews in some

ways mirror those we are learning about in Corinth. They had been in the church for some years and they had a wonderful base. However, even worse than the folks in Corinth, the people in this church had grown and then backslid. These Christians had endured much for the Gospel faithfully, but then later had grown soft and were walking away from the church at only the potentiality for difficulty. This too is something that is all too common. Someone will grow in their faith for a number of years, then they will get lazy in their faith, and instead of continuing to grow they will slowly walk backwards. I see this a lot with youth group kids and adults with children. We will see great growth in our kids from the time they get into youth group up until they get their driver's license or so, and then they will begin to decline in their church attendance, their reading/praying, and ultimately in their faith. The reason is easy to explain, most of those kids who grow are supported greatly in their church, and they are involved in God-filled activities multiple times a week. When they get their license and can now make some of their own choices, the temptation to skip church or to skip youth group for other things becomes greater. The temptations in their own lives gets more excessive as well, and the result is that many will slowly walk away and go from being solid growing Christians to being Christian babies once more. The parents of these children will often actually go through this same regression. When they no longer have to worry about bringing their kids to Sunday school, youth group, and church, then it becomes convenient for them to not worry about their own faith as well. The results of backsliding as a Christian are obvious... we revert back to milk from meat, and quarrels and divisions and self-indulgence and the like creep in once more.

In the end, the results of a stagnant faith or a backsliding faith are ultimately the same. They result at best in a Christian becoming useless in their calling, and at worst in the loss of salvation for that Christian and maybe even for others. To combat a stagnant faith or a backsliding one, Paul states in 13:11 how we are to actually approach our faith. "When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things." Beloved, for some of us here today it is time we grow up in our faith and do away with childish action. It is time for many of you to get serious in your walk.

Brass tacks, most of the time we know what we should do and how should act don't we? We know we should read our Bibles more, pray more, be more involved in church, talk to others about our faith more, etc. Why don't we though? Any number of excuses get in the way, and these may or may not apply to you, and all of them sound like the things we would say as kids to get out of something that was ultimately good for us. "I don't need to read my Bible if I am in church," sounds a lot like a college kid arguing that they don't need to study if they go to class. "I am not gifted in speaking about Jesus," or "I struggle to pray out loud" sounds a lot like a kid giving the excuse that they are bad at math and that's why they don't do their homework. Beloved, I encourage you to put away the childish excuses if they are in your life, and to take the next step in your growth... to move from milk to meat spiritually. There are many ways you can grow!

To end today's message, I want to give you some ideas about how you can grow if your faith has stalled or backslid. If you are being convicted like the Corinthians or Hebrews we mentioned

that your faith is not growing, here are some things you can do. Number one is to get in the Word. If you are not reading your Bible regularly, this is the best thing you can do to grow as a Christian. If you haven't read through an entire Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) then start there. The Gospel of Matthew will be our focus for Lent, so take that challenge and read through it. If you are married or have kids, read it with them. If you don't understand everything that is ok, it is all practice and the more time you spend in your Bible the more you will understand it and everything that we do at your church. The second thing you can do to grow is to get involved in something Jesus related. We have a bunch of options as your church for how you can get involved in serving and growing. We have a couple of small groups that are meeting even during these times (online), we have Youth Group and Sunday School for our kids, we have various ministry related groups where you can lend your talents towards growing God's kingdom, and even if you don't think you are perfect in these it is worth giving it a shot. Even if you are involved in something outside our churches but is Jesus based, that is a great way to increase your growth. Third is to pray, and to pray often. I will go out on a limb and say that most of us pray, but that we don't pray in an intentional way, especially with others. There is nothing that makes a bigger impact upon your children than seeing your pray with them, for them, and for others. Prayer is just communicating with God, it isn't fancy words, so don't fret if your prayers don't sound perfect... just communicate with God and see how He works. The last thing I would encourage you to do to grow as a Christian, to move from milk to meat, is to ask God where He is calling you to go. It should be a common question that you ask of Him and that you ask of yourself, "What is God calling me to?" He will answer that prayer, and if you are seeking that answer it will be revealed to you. Beloved, I pray that we as God's children here in Dodge County would actively be moving from milk to meat, that we would be growing in the faith. It is what healthy Christians do. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer