

## Sermon – 21/09/2008 am

### Babes in Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 4:14

Have you ever watched an infant taking their first steps? They usually get themselves up on a piece of furniture, try to get steady on their feet, and then step out towards the next piece of furniture. The slightest distraction or bump will cause them to lose balance and tumble over. Sometimes slightly older children delight in giving that struggling toddler a bump just to watch them fall in a heap.

We were all babies and toddlers at one time but we have grown up. We can stand and walk with confidence. We are not easily pushed over. That is our physical status; but what about our spiritual status. We were babes in Christ at one time. We were born again of the Spirit of God. We were vulnerable to every wind of teaching, but what about now? Have you matured in the faith? Are you standing firm in your faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ?

This is the question the apostle Paul addresses to the church at Ephesus. He confronted the church at Corinth with the same question. ‘You are not spiritual but babes in Christ’ he wrote (I Corinthians 3:1). You are still on milk when you should be on solid food (Hebrews 5:12f). Think of a child taking their bottle with them to school – is that you? Their spiritual immaturity was evident in their infantile behaviour – envy, strife and divisions marked the church at Corinth.

### Babes No Longer

Paul was urging the believers at Ephesus to exercise their spiritual gifts so that the church might be built up, to the glory of God. He pictures the church as a body. He goes on to describe how it should grow up and mature into a man or adult (4:13). Christ himself is the measure of this man. It is through the fullness of Christ, through being connected with the head and working together as one that the body becomes complete.

*That we should no longer be children* (4:14). The word ‘children’ contrasts with ‘man’ in the previous verse. *Children* is really ‘infant’ or ‘babe’. The literal meaning is ‘non-speaking’. Notice the ‘but speaking’ in the next verse. Without the power of speech the infant cannot ask questions. It cannot discern truth from error.

If someone offers an infant something that looks tasty they cannot ask where it came from, or what the motives of the giver are. The infant is vulnerable for lack of speech and lack of knowledge. Aware of the dangers infants face in the community, parents teach them their name, address and phone number. Such information may save them when trouble comes.

What knowledge do your children have to save them from spiritual attack? What knowledge do you have to save you from spiritual attack? Such attacks will surely come. Will you be able to resist? Are you maturing in your faith in Jesus Christ? Are you *adding to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, and to godliness brotherly love* (II Peter 1:5)?

## Tossed About

To the image of a non-speaking, faltering infant, Paul adds that of a boat being tossed about on a rough sea. He well knew what this was like for he was shipwrecked on his way to Rome and the prison from where he wrote this letter. For a fortnight his ship was buffeted by the wind and the waves. It was blown off course and eventually on to the beach of Malta.

So it is for babes in Christ, for believers who lack knowledge of Christ and the wisdom of God. They are easily blown off course by a new wind of teaching. Did you know that most members of heretical sects are not pagan converts but lapsed Christians sucked in by new and novel teachings? They have grown up in Christian homes and been to church from time to time. But they found worship dull and reading the Bible uninteresting. They wanted something new and exciting, just like children.

‘The pride of the human heart does not like to be thought old fashioned’ writes Ferguson. ‘A new wind blows through each year, and a hurricane every few years. Many are swept off their feet by teaching that may begin with an open but misinterpreted Bible and ends with a deceived mind’.

This writer was not necessarily referring to heretical sects but to churches that have departed from orthodoxy. Churches today are compelled to be innovative and constantly changing. New songs and new music are a must for modern churches. ‘Flavour of the month’ preachers or celebrities must be invited to satisfy the members. Whether or not the Bible is being faithfully preached is no longer a priority. Any wind of doctrine can blow and the people accept it if it has majority approval. How can a church with hundreds or thousands of members be wrong? Some winds blow very strong.

‘Prolonged, intensive, faithful exposition of God’s word delivers us from immaturity’. We must feed on ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ if we are to grow and be strong in the Lord. We must also exercise if we are to be strong. This passage is about spiritual gifts that are to be exercised in the church as we have already seen. See what is written in Hebrews. *Solid food is for those who are mature, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil* (Hebrews 5:14).

## Deceived

Winds of teaching, especially false teaching, do not just blow our way but are often aimed directly at us. Men devise tricks and schemes to lure spiritual infants away from the truth. *Trickery/sleight* comes from a Greek word meaning to ‘throw the dice’ – or in popular political parlance ‘spin’. False teaching is dished up with a lot of spin! The other words here are *clever/cunning*, and *crafty/wiles*, and *error/deceit*. This is quite a collection of words!

False teachers have learnt from the devil how to scheme and deceive. The arch deceiver was very successful with Eve in the garden of Eden. ‘Did God really say you shall not eat of every tree in the garden?’ He cast the seeds of doubt which took root in the heart of this spiritual infant. What would a spiritually mature Eve have done? Look at Jesus when he was tempted by the devil. He checked in God’s word and quoted Scripture.

Since the time of Adam and Eve the devil has extra weapons in his armoury. He says to babes in Christ ‘look what everyone else is doing – so many others can’t be wrong’ – he could not say that to Adam and Eve! He also says ‘look at what the experts are saying’. Learned men in

colleges say things and we are supposed to accept what they say. Archaeologists agree that crucified men were never buried so Jesus was not buried according to a recent documentary. But the Bible says he was buried and that he rose again from the dead. Go and check what the Bible says and cling to God's truth.

'Young converts are attacked by those who create doubts in their minds as to the authority of the Bible, the Person of our Lord, the substitutionary atonement and various other essential aspects of the Christian faith and in their ignorance may be led astray temporarily' (Martin Lloyd-Jones). Luther and Calvin discovered the doctrines of the Pope were not found in the Bible. They stood firm against the powerful blast of trickery and error that came their way. Babes in Christ would not have lasted a moment.

False teaching is not specifically identified in this letter to the Ephesians, although Paul did warn the elders of this church previously that such things would come after he left them (Acts 20:29-30). Moreover, in the nearby church of Colossae false teaching was already impacting the church. *Beware lest anyone cheat you (take you captive) through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ* (Colossians 2:8).

Science and philosophy have blown many a babe in Christ off course. Just look at the philosophy of evolution – evolution is not science even though it is taught as such. Scientific facts are made to fit the theory, but those same facts support what the Bible says – there is no conflict. Too many who call themselves Christians are less familiar with the Bible than with what evolutionists and humanists teach.

Be alert; be equipped. Be armed and ready to defend your faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus the Son of God, Jesus who was fully human and fully God, Jesus who physically and fully died upon the Cross and physically rose from the dead. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the craftiness/wiles of the devil (6:11). What is that armour of God? It has various parts all based upon the word of God.

Are you still a babe in Christ or are you more mature now than when you first believed? How do we grow in Christ? By meditating on his word! You cannot grow if you are not reading your Bible regularly. You cannot grow if you are not joining in worship and fellowship regularly. Remember the body of Christ is the context in which you must grow and become complete in Christ Jesus.

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