

LESSON 22

CHRISTIAN MATURITY



INTRODUCTION: “The **germination** of the seed represents **the beginning of spiritual life**, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of

Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die.

As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, **there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.** As our opportunities **multiply**, our **experience will enlarge**, and **our knowledge increase**. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and **our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges.**”(COL 65.2)

“When I was a child, **I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child**; but when I became a man, **I put away childish things.**”(1 Corinthians 13:11)

Christian growth is one thing that is very important when it comes to salvation. The difference is here made between a child and an adult person. A child[who is immature] doesn't do things like an adult [who is mature]. So there should be a different between the one who just starts to learn about Christ and the one who's not new in

faith. In order for us to arrive at the center of this discussion, let's begin by looking at the

Food for Babes.

It is a well known fact that a new born babe does not eat solid food[meat] simply because the teeth are not yet developed. But as the babe starts to grow up and the teeth are slowly coming up, he adapts to eating small solid food till the full age is reached when he can chew solid food without any problem. It is wrong, therefore, to give a new born babe solid food which can't be chewed.

The Falling away...

“Let no one deceive you by any means; **for that Day** will not come unless **the falling away comes first ...**” (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

The Apostle here is pointing out that the Day of the Lord, the coming of Christ, isn't going to come before this

“falling away”. What does “falling away” mean?

Imagine two people are asked to cross the river by, first hanging to the string which is above the water and then jump to the other side. The first person holds to the string and crosses over. The second one holds also to the string but instead of jumping over to the other side he falls into the river and loses out.

Thus it is with Faith. While we are all introduced to the same Faith (“one faith” - Eph 4:5), yet not all will **develop that faith and endure with it till the end**, some will **neglect it and fall away**. **Those, too, who do not grow up in their Bible knowledge will eventually fall away.**

Thus The apostle predicted that there must be “ **the falling away**”[apostasy] of the Christians **from the faith** before Christ comes .

“Now the Spirit expressly says that **in latter times some will depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving

spirits and doctrines of demons..”(1 Timothy 4:1)

A warning given.

“Therefore we must give **the more earnest heed** to the things **we have heard**, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels **proved steadfast**, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation**, which at the **first began to be spoken by the Lord**, and was confirmed to us by **those who heard Him..** ”
(Hebrews 2:1-3)

Here we are told that there’s the danger of **drifting away** [**falling away**] **from the truth** that we’ve learnt. And as God as delivered to us “**so great a salvation**” how shall we escape His judgment if we neglect it?

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief **in departing from the living God**; but exhort one another **daily**, while it is called ‘Today,’ **lest any of**

you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
(Hebrews 3:12,13)

The deceitfulness of sin hardens one's heart and causes him to depart[fall away] from the living God. **To the one who cannot hold on to God's truth and grow thereby, the only thing that awaits him is “falling away”. Half conversion, too, places an individual in the same dangerous place.**

“For we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold** the beginning of **our confidence steadfast to the end.**”
(Hebrews 3:14)

Thus just being introduced to the truth isn't enough. It is only those **who increase in learning the truth** and “endures to the end **shall be saved.**”(Matt 24:13)

This same principle is again told in the following scriptures...

“And we desire that **each one** of you **show the same**

diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become **sluggish[not progressing, lazy]**, but imitate those who **through faith and patience** inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ And so, **after he had patiently endured**, he obtained the promise.”(Hebrews 6:11-15)

Again we read...

“Therefore **do not cast away your confidence**, which has great reward. For you have **need of endurance**, so that **after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise**: ‘For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now **the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back**, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are **not of those who draw back to perdition**, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”(Hebrews 10:35-39)

Thus the Lord is not pleased with those who, after they've heard the word, **draw back**[fall away] **not enduring until the end**. Notice that they draw back to perdition, while their fellow believers **grow up to “maturity” unto everlasting life**.

The lesson taught by these scriptures is clear: When you know the Lord, you should neither stay the same [without growing] nor drift away. You must make sure to grow spiritually unto life eternal.

The Problem with the Hebrews...

“So also Christ did not glorify Himself...though He was a Son, yet He learned **obedience** by the things which He suffered. And **having been perfected**, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him ... of whom we have much to say, **and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**”(Hebrews 5:5,8,9,11)

The hebrews had become dull of hearing. Paul, therefore, could not explain many things which he had about Jesus

Christ.

Says the Messenger of the Lord, “Paul could not speak to the Jewish converts as plainly as he desired regarding the mystery of godliness. **Because of their spiritual weakness, their lack of perception, he could not utter the truth, which, could they have heard aright, with intelligent comprehension, would have been to them a savor of life unto life.** The fault was not with their instructors, but with themselves. **They were dull of understanding.** Abundant advantages had been given them. **They could have increased in understanding regarding Christ, His work, His power to save to the uttermost all who come to Him. But they had not pressed onward and upward, improving their opportunity to learn more and still more of the Saviour.** Because they had not received in faith the truths imparted to them, **their memory was weak.** They could **not retain in their minds the truths essential to success in character-building.**”(6BC 1085.8.9)

Are we too, at this late hour, going to be full of hearing

like the Hebrews? If so, how are we going to understand the truth that can make us grow?

Not Solid food but Milk for Babes...



“For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again **the first principles of the oracles of God**; and you have come to **need milk and not solid food.**”(Hebrews 5:12)

“...**the first principles of the oracles of God**” you see, are the **basic doctrines of the Bible** or Salvation, the simple or basic teachings introduced to new converts.

“Solid food” can only point to the advanced teachings of the Bible.

The Hebrews **“had not pressed onward and upward, improving their opportunity to learn more and still more of the Saviour.”** but were dull of hearing. These were unqualified to be teachers of the word and thus needed again to learn **the basic teachings of the gospel.**

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”(Hebrews 5:13)

New converts as well as those who only have the basic teachings of the word **are babes and therefore unqualified to teach the word of righteousness.** Are you still a babe, brother, sister, or are you growing up to adulthood?. It is for this very reason that the Church should not choose **“babes”** as leaders or teachers. Commands the word regarding the selection of church leaders: **“He must not be a recent convert”**(1 Tim 3:6

NIV)

“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”(Hebrews 5:14)

The Lord here points out that **the Advanced teachings of the word** can be understood by those who are of “**full age**”, **mature Christians**. This you see is what enables them to discern both good and evil, thus they “**cease to do evil**” and “**learn to do well**”(Isa 1:16,17). **Matured Christianity**, you see dear friends, means **perfection: the very thing that makes one to cease evil and do good.**

Although The New Converts are not to be fed with solid food(**advanced teachings**) in the first place, yet they need to understand that unless they **start growing up** to the “full age”, **they cannot be perfect.**

“It is positively necessary for those who believe the truth, to be making continual advancement, growing

up unto the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. There is no time for backsliding and indifference. Each one must have a living experience in the things of God. Have root in yourselves. Become grounded in the faith, so that having done all you may stand, with unwavering confidence in God, through the time that will try every man's work and character. Exercise your powers in spiritual things, till you can appreciate the deep things of God's word, and go on from strength strength.”(RH January 10, 1888, par. 9)

Let’s look further at this “full growth” - matured Christianity by understanding the

Solid Food for the grown up Christians.



“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, **a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son**, and shall call his name **Immanuel**. **Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.**..”(Isaiah 7:14-15)

To begin with, This prophecy, as commonly known, points to the birth of Christ (Matthew 1:21-23).

Next, we see that **Butter** and **honey** are the foods given to Christ. But according to this scripture, Butter and honey would make Christ **refuse evil and choose good**.

Unquestionably, then, Butter and honey here **must be symbolical of something other than literal food, for literal food can in no wise make someone choose good and refuse evil.** Moreover there's no record that Christ, when he walked among men, ate only butter and honey, but ate every lawful food at that time, even with publicans and sinners(compare with Matthew 11:9, Luke 5:30)

The only logical conclusion is that **Butter[solid food]** and **honey[its sweetness]** are symbolical of the **the word of God**, enabling someone to “cease to do evil” and “learn to do good”

Thus Christ said “**I have food to eat of which you do not know.**”(John 4:32)

“ Paul refers to teachers of truth **who have faithfully studied the Scriptures**, as ‘those who by reason of use **have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**”(RH October 26, 1905, par. 3)



Thus did Christ increase “**in wisdom**” to overcome “**by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**”
(Matthew 4:4, Luke 2:52)

Next we shall read...

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall **nourish a young cow, and two sheep**; And it shall come to pass, **for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land..**”(Isaiah 7:21-22)

Since **Butter** and **honey** represent the **Solid word** of God and how sweet it is like the **little book** of Rev 10, the milk(from which it is made) and the three milk producing animals - two sheep and a young cow - **must be**

symbolical of the source, even the written word. The two sheep can only represent the Old and New testament, while the young cow (young in the sense that it was born after the two sheep, and also being larger in size than them) can only point to the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. Consequently, from the writing of both the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy, one gets butter[advanced teachings] and honey[its sweetness] and thus grows up to distinguish good from evil.

“for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.”(Isaiah 7:22)

Those who are “**left**” in the land are actually left in Zion, the Church.

“And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of

judgment, and by the spirit of burning..”(Isaiah 4:3-4)

Thus the Judgment **“at the house of God”**(1 Peter 4:17) spares only the gown up Christians who feed on Butter and honey. **All who are too lazy to study and who fail to grow up into perfection will be sifted out.**

The teaching of the apostle about **Maturity** in Hebrews 5 continues in chapter 6...

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [maturity]...”(Hebrews 6:1)

Though as babes we are to feed on the **“elementary principles”** or basic teachings of Christ, yet we shouldn’t remain there. We must grow up to maturity or perfection by feeding to solid food...

He continues...

“...not laying again the foundation of repentance from

dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”(Hebrews 6:1-3)

These, you see, are some of the basic teachings of the gospel.

“ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”(Hebrews 6:4-6)

Such people who make **no effort to grow up spiritually** but neglect **“ so great a salvation ”** and willfully disregard the sacrifice of Christ, fall away from faith, and it's impossible to renew them again to repentance.

“ For if we sin willfully after we have received the

knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”(Hebrews 10:26)

“For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.”(2 Peter 2:21)

Do not be comfortable with your present spiritual attainments...

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”(Revelation 3:17)

“ It is difficult for those who feel secure in their attainments, and who believe themselves to be rich in spiritual knowledge, to receive the message which declares that they are deceived and in need of every spiritual grace. The unsanctified heart is ‘deceitful

above all things, and desperately wicked.’ I was shown that **many are flattering themselves that they are good Christians, who have not a ray of light from Jesus. They have not a living experience for themselves in the divine life.**”(3T 253.1)

The Lord’s standard...

“ But **continue thou in the things which thou hast learned** and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that **from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, **for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**”(2Timothy 3:14- 17)

Thus, those who neglect the studying of the scriptures, and those who only enjoy listening to smooth things, will

never become wise unto salvation and consequently won't grow up to perfection [maturity]

“In **searching** out the various parts and **studying** their relationship, **the highest faculties of the human mind are called into intense activity. No one can engage in such study without developing mental power ... The mind occupied with commonplace matters only, becomes dwarfed and enfeebled. If never tasked to comprehend grand and far-reaching truths, it after a time loses the power of growth.** As a safeguard against this degeneracy, and a stimulus to development, nothing else can equal the study of God's word.”(Ed 124)

Thus the “**the Spirit of truth**” works through different gifts in the Church “**For the perfecting [maturity] of the saints**... Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and **of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [matured] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.**”(Ephesians 4:12,13)

This is the standard set for us by the Lord. **To grow up, to**

mature, to become perfect.

“That we **henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,** by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, **may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.**”(Ephesians 4:14,15)

Not as children who can be tossed to and fro by anything that comes, **but as adult Christians to stand firm for the word, and to follow the truth wherever it goes, to mean business and be intolerant of nonsense. Let us “grow up into him[Christ] in all things”**

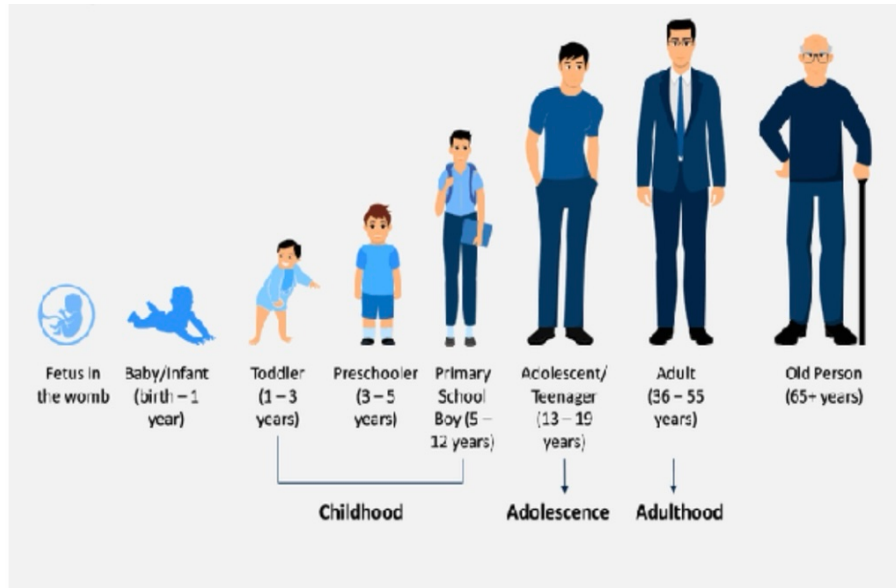
Unquestionably **the time has come for all church members to realize that they are now passing from Christian childhood into Christian maturity, and should, therefore, no longer try to reach the stature of the full grown by continuing to feed on the food of babes.**

“The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.”(CW 33.2)

“If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world.”(CCh 345.6)

Consequently, **those who are ever-progressing, keeping pace with the march of Truth, are the only real Christians.**

Child Birth...



The process of child birth teaches an important lesson. First the Woman **conceives**, then the unborn baby **slowly develops** for 40 weeks **until he is born**. After birth, the child must **continue growing till he becomes an adult**.

Similarly , when **one joins the church, she becomes pregnant for that one**. As a pregnant mother provides good nutrition to the unborn baby before birth, **so the Church must teach new converts before they get baptized, “born again”** (John 3:3,5). After child birth, the mother continues to look after her child by giving him good food, **so the Church must continue to teach new baptized members and encourage them to study on their own till they grow up in Christ**. Teaching, you

see, must be done both before and after baptism
(Matthew 28:19,20)

But “**Too much hasty work is done in adding names to the church roll.** Serious **defects** are seen in the characters of some who join the church. **Those who admit them say, We will first get them into the church, and then reform them. But this is a mistake. The very first work to be done is the work of reform..**”(RH May 21, 1901, par. 7)

It is for this very reason that the church as a whole becomes dwarf on daily basis, because much care isn't given to who and who shouldn't be baptized.

The purpose of the former and latter rain.



“Be glad then, ye **children of Zion**, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for **he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month**...And it shall come to pass **afterward**, that I **will pour out my spirit upon all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” (Joel 2:23, 28)

The **purpose of the former rain is to germinate the seed. Then the latter or last rain ripens the grain for the harvest**. Notice that the Lord first gives the former rain, then he gives the latter rain which **carries with it the**

former rain.

“As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ...Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection.”(LDE 183.2.3)

Notice again that it is the latter rain that brings about maturity or perfection. That matured Christianity is the reproduction of the perfect image of God in his people. That this work is done by the Holy Spirit.

“The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was ‘the former rain,’ and glorious was the result. But the latter rain will be more abundant..” (LDE

185.5)

The Holy Spirit being **in the form of truth as well as in form of power**(John 14:17,16:13, Acts 1:8), it should be remembered that the core purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit power on the day of Pentecost was to **enable the disciples to preach the same Holy Spirit in form of truth (as Jesus taught them)**

Thus they had to learn **the pre-Pentecostal truth by Jesus before they were given the Pentecostal power to proclaim it.**

Similarly, the outpouring of the latter rain Pentecostal power is, necessarily, **to be preceded by the Pentecostal truth of the Loud cry**, for Joel records that the spirit power is to be poured out “**afterward**”(Joel 2:28), that is **after the latter rain of truth** [Joel 2:23, Rev 18:1] is given.

The former rain of power was not given until the disciples had obeyed the truth which they heard and had come into

“perfect unity.”(Acts 2:1, LDE 184.2.3)

Now in view of the fact that **“It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost.”**(LDE 192.3,193.1), and also that the latter rain brings about **spiritual maturity**, of shunning all that is evil, then no one can dodge the fact that **the latter Pentecostal power will only be poured out upon mature Christians, those who’ve heeded the message of the True Witness**(Rev 3:14-17) and have purified their souls **“by obeying the truth”**(1 Peter 1:22) and are prepared **for the harvest** to stand as wheat.

Thus **“The great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain.....”**(3SM 385.3).

The latter rain of power, you see, is not going to be poured out, and the Loud cry work is not going to go forth, until

the Church is cleansed and remains with “living members” who are pure and true - **mature members only**.

Finally, the fact that **maturity** or **perfection** enables one “**to discern both good and evil..**”(Hebrews 5:14) due to **the full image of God** reproduced in him, and since we’re still struggling with our sins (not yet perfect), then the only time when this **matured Christianity will be realized in it’s fullness** is when “**God will have a people pure and true.**” after “**the mighty sifting soon to take place.**”(5T 79.4), When he shall **cleanse** them from all their “**filthiness**” and their “**idols**”(Ez 36:25,26, 37:23)

Then it shall come to pass that...

“The **remnant of Israel**[who are left in the Church the shaking or sifting - the 144,000] **shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth:** for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid..”(Zephaniah 3:13, Rev 14:5)

Then it is that “ **Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness**, the church is to enter upon her final conflict. ‘ **Fair as the moon, clear as the sun**, and terrible as an army with banners’ (Song of Solomon 6:10), she is to go forth into all the world, conquering and to conquer.”(PK 725.2)

Thus will the Lord sanctify His great name, **when shall shall be sanctified in his mature people**(Eze 36:23)

And to those who may still doubt that this condition of sinlessness won ’ t exist before Christ comes, we ask: What is it that Christ is waiting for?

Inspiration gives an answer...

“ **Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own..** “(LDE 39.2)

“Then the church which our Lord at his coming is to receive to himself will be ‘a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. ’”
[Ephesians 5:27.] (GC88 425.2)

Let none flatter themselves that they can escape the clutches of the devil **by the studious effort of another.** **Everyone must study for himself to understand his own position, and with candid mind be ready to listen to all with a teachable spirit of a child.** Do not, therefore, brethren remain **dwarfs** in your Christian journey. **There’s no graduation in the school of Christ.** Follow all the revealed light, study Christ, triumph over sin, attain **“righteousness by faith”** and thus shall **His perfect righteousness** be imparted to you, and you strongly detest evil.

“None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”(GC88 593.2)

