

Pressing on to Maturity

I once saw one of those funny video shows on television of a small boy, probably around 3 years old, who was being asked to count. He starts counting on his fingers, '1, 2, 3, 4, 5.' His mom asks, "Can you count any higher?" Her precious son thinks for just a brief moment and then lifts up his hands high over his head and begins counting on his fingers again, '1, 2, 3, 4, 5.' This sweet little boy is learning but, of course, he is a long way from full maturity. Immaturity is defined as, "Not being fully developed or grown." Learning how to count is one of the basic things a child learns as he or she is growing to maturity. How can the story of this little boy illustrate immaturity in our Christian lives?

Even those who have been Christians for years can often be tempted to forget the basics. Before we further address the topic of immaturity we must first acknowledge that there has to be a birth. It is a very basic biblical truth to say that, just as we do not contribute to our physical birth, we do not contribute to our spiritual birth. To be 'born again' (John 3) is to be 'born from above.' God is the One who brings about spiritual birth, not us. The apostle Paul comes at this in another way. He teaches us that before anyone becomes a child of God they are 'dead in their trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1-10). We can no more save ourselves than we could bring ourselves back to life if we were dead. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, this is not your own doing, it is a gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Having said that our new birth is not based on what we do, but rather it is based on what God determines to do, we can now move on to the basic teaching that those who are truly born again will have new desires (but not perfect desires) to be pleasing to their Father in Heaven who loves his children.

In the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, Jesus teaches us another very basic truth; those who are truly 'blessed' or 'happy' are those who are seeking, by grace, to be obedient to God's word given to us in scripture. I say, 'by grace' because we are not sufficient in and of ourselves to do anything that will ultimately be pleasing to God; our sufficiency is in Jesus Christ alone (2 Corinthians 12:9). One other basic truth that I would like to note is that we should seek to obey God's word from the proper motivation of love and thankfulness. To the extent that we can grasp these basic truths we can begin to joyfully submit to our Father's will; obeying his word, not out of fear or guilt, but out of love for him and thankfulness for his mercies all of which are good signs that we are maturing in our faith.

The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:20, writes: "Brothers, do not be children in your

thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.” May God help us to remember the basics and press on toward spiritual maturity, resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on behalf of his people.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton.