

1 Peter 2

Sunday 2/27/2005

I am glad you are here today, and I want to invite you to open your Bible to the book of 1 Peter chapter 2. If you do not have a Bible this morning, if somebody can just, one of the ushers back there can raise your hand, we will get you one. We have Bibles here for you. If you would like to keep it, you are welcome to have it. We want everybody to have a copy of the Word of God to look at. If you are with somebody here that is a friend, you can look on with them, whatever works. We are going to get to 1 Peter chapter 2 here in just a little bit.

Last week we began to talk about the seven things internally that really give you a yardstick spiritually so you can measure your spiritual growth. I think spiritual growth is probably the number one thing that most of God's people never really look at and understand. I think because of that, it forms a problem many times because we just do not really fully grasp the concept of how it all goes together.

We are about ready to start working in people's lives with the Word of God. We have taken a year and a half now; we have been together as a church, and we have really worked on the fundamental things. We are ready now to take the next step to be able to, one, teach your families the Word of God and teach other people as they come into our church the Word of God that is needed.

We started last week by looking at the fact that you have to look internally first. Let me just say that what you do with last week's message will be in direct relationship to how far you grow to be with the Lord because it all comes back to you and to me. I never deal with people. I never look at people's problems, and I do a lot of counseling. I do a lot of working one-on-one, teaching people the Word of God and working through everything from raising their kids to marital problems to whatever. I never look at a person's problem without looking at my own self first because that is the absolute golden rule of dealing with people. You view people through your own shortcomings and your own problems, and that is why we talked about last week how you have to understand what your limitations are when it comes to your own self.

I. The Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth

For the next month or so, we are going to talk about the seven stages of spiritual growth. I am going to bring you through a process that basically brings you in your life from milk to meat. It brings you from what the Bible calls a babe in Christ to someone that is mature in the Word of God and is able to really minister and touch other people's lives.

As you read through the Bible, an amazing study develops. It is not a study that is based on one man's life or even a series of people's lives, but the Holy Spirit of God draws your attention to a growth process. Throughout the New Testament, as you come through it, you are going to find that the Bible makes references to seven stages of growth. Those seven stages of growth are not only in a physical sense what we go through, but in a spiritual sense, it is also what we go through from the day we trust Christ as our personal Savior through the process to bring us to the point where the Bible indicates that we have the mind of Christ and are really functioning. Not

that you are ever going to be perfect, but you are functioning in a model in your life and a role in your life that you are really accomplishing things for the Lord.

We are going to talk about those stages, but we are going to focus on the first stage, and every week we will come through one or two as we go through it. Throughout the Bible, there are stories of men's lives. I have told you before that there are seven men in the Old Testament that if you would study their lives, they really would give you a complete view of all the things that we are going to go through in life, and they all have the same goal: to have a relationship with God. None of them started with the right relationship when they started, just like you and I, and you will find in every one of their lives a process. That story is true of every man and woman in the Bible. Nobody starts out perfect. Nobody starts out where they need to be, and they all go through these seven stages of spiritual growth.

The first place I get a glimpse of it is all the way back in the book of Proverbs. I have told you before that Proverbs is probably the greatest book in the Bible that deals with the issues of life that we all have to face. The first seven chapters start out, and every start of every chapter in the first seven, it starts by saying, "my son" or "my little children." You are going to find that in those first seven chapters, you really get the meat of what we are going to talk about. Over the next couple of weeks, you are going to see me drawing on the book of Proverbs in many, many ways to help accent some of the things that we are going to look at from the New Testament standpoint.

I told you last week that these seven stages of spiritual growth are outward. Everybody sees them. Everybody sees what goes on in this process and these seven stages. This is what the New Testament church in the book of Acts looked for when they were picking leaders. It is what I look for. I can tell someone, and as you probably can, whether they are growing spiritually or not, just by the outward things or the things that change about their own process of spiritual growth within the family of God.

Within a New Testament church, we find that every church needs to have all of these. I liken it, when we first started talking about it, to our Memorial Day picnic, which is coming up here Memorial Day. We all get together. Everybody has fun, but everybody does different things according to where you are at in life. I watch the little kids; they want to be on the playground stuff. That does not interest me. I watch the older folks sit around and talk and like to have fun. That is more interesting to me every day. Then I watch you young guys, and I watch you playing softball, running the bases, knocking the ball away out there, and all those things. I see that is all kind of a blend of things. Everybody is at different areas. You have the young kids playing on that, and they do not mix much. I do not see Beverly sliding into second base. She is with me looking for the shuffleboard court.

When you step back and you look at that picnic, it is like a family reunion. Everybody is excited about the newborn baby. Everybody is playing with the kids, and then the dads give the kids that they go do this, and everybody does this, and you step back and look at it. You have the old folks that kind of look over and enjoy everything and just having a nice sense of being here and everybody just having a great time and enjoying the spirit and the food and the fellowship. Then

you have the young guys that are trying to challenge each other to beat in the softball game. You have the little kids that are sticking stuff in people's hair over there and the playground, and eating dirt and all that stuff. They are doing their thing, but the whole family is just together, and everybody is in different stages of spiritual growth. That is what a church should be like. We ought to be constantly as a church, having people in all those stages, but moving through those stages. That is what is so important about a church. A church needs to understand and recognize the seven stages of spiritual growth and understand that everybody in this room this morning, if you are saved, you are in one of these areas.

I want to talk about these, and I am going to give them to you, and then we are going to focus on the first one.

1. The first concept you finally have on the Word of God is babes or babies.
2. The second one is little children.
3. Then you are going to find a reference to children.
4. Then you are going to find a reference to young men.
5. Then you are going to find a reference to fathers.
6. Then you are going to find a reference to elders.
7. Then you are going to find a reference to the aged.

In all of these references, there are going to be principles that go along with it. You just do not go through the Bible and pick this term out. No, these terms are laid out systematically through the New Testament, and with them, you see a whole concept that is relative to that position in spiritual growth or really physical growth.

As you look at it and you understand, I look at our church right now, and I look at our church from having men and women who I would classify in the father stage and then down. I put myself in that classification. We do not have any elders or any aged. Fathers is a broad term, and we get into that. You are going to see what constitutes that concept spiritually. My goal is to get you through that process and to get myself through that process where we grow and mature to the point where you see things from the standpoint that we need to see it and understand it, and then we can deal with things in the ministry in a much better way and deal with people in a much better way and then help other people along. You are going to see as we come through these seven all of the attributes that go along with them: how they impact the church, impact other people, impact young Christians, and how it raises the leadership to the top in any church, and if you are paying attention, that is what you are dealing with.

II. Parallels: Physical and Spiritual Growth

In this study, you are going to get a double hit because not only are we going to look at the concept of spiritual growth as in Christians, but you cannot study spiritual growth without talking about physical growth. You are going to find out in our study, and it just parallels along those lines, that as you train up your children as parents—and we have a host of parents that have little kids, we have new babies all the time, probably have one addition right now as I am speaking—as you train your children, and I use the word "train" as the Bible does, because you

do not raise children. You raise rabbits, you raise dogs, you raise cats, you raise corn, you raise tomatoes, but you train children. That is why the Bible puts the emphasis on training. "Train up a child in the way he should go," or "train up a child and away he goes," but either way, you train them, and that is the Bible's designation.

Just like you have to train your children, you have to train young Christians, and the process and the growth process and the seven stages of spiritual growth are the same. As you go through and train your children through these seven stages, you are going to find that you are going to enter into what we call the four character traits of children. As a parent, you are going to instill into your child all of those traits, and as a pastor or as someone who works with people, you are going to do the same thing in a young Christian's life.

We talked about babies, we talked about little children and children, we talked about young men and fathers, we talked about the elders and the aged. Now I want to go through and I want to show you how this thing all goes together here as far as these stages.

- When you are dealing with babies, you are into the discipline stage.
- When you move through the little children or children, then you are into what we call the relationship stage. This is where children begin to build relationships. When they are in the infant mode, they cannot build relationships, but they are in a discipline mode. That is where you begin to teach them what is right and what is wrong.
- As they move through the little children and the children into the young men and the fathers, then you teach them the responsibility stage.
- As they move into the elders or the aged, then you teach them the leadership stage.

The way it should go ideally, if you have children and if you are dealing with spiritual people, it should run like this. Most parents, by the time their kids get 15 or 16 years old, they are putting more restrictions on them because the kids are becoming more out of control. When it ought to be just the opposite from the Bible standpoint. This process is the same process you deal with in dealing with Christians. As a child gets older, when you take the time to train the discipline mode, and you take the time to train them in the relationship mode, and you take the time to train them in the responsibility mode. Now the responsibility mode will put them up there where they are 15, 16 years old, physically speaking. You ought to be coming to the place where you are taking restrictions off of them and allowing them to take responsibility for themselves based on what you have trained them in up to this point.

I know that that is not the way it works today because of the breakdown of the family and parents, for whatever reasons, refusal to see that the Word of God is the greatest book to train your children by, but that is just the way it is. I also know it is true in dealing with young Christians because when I take a young Christian that just got saved, this is the mode that I

follow. I begin to build in their lives the discipline concept. We are going to talk about that discipline in their own daily life of understanding, and we will talk about that more as we come on down through it. Then I bring them through the relationship stage, then I bring them through the responsibility stage, and then I enter them into the leadership stage. That leadership stage is the end result. That is where they continue to grow the rest of their life, and they only become a better leader. In time, they become a pastor, and in time, they become somebody that really can deal with people and help people and minister the Word of God to people in a great way.

God's plan is absolutely foolproof. As a parent, here are the parallels: as a parent, I reproduce myself, whatever I am, as a parent. As a parent, I reproduce myself in my children. Parents do not like this sometimes, but your children will be a mirrored image of what you are because you are the only one that has trained them. Just by the same token, as a pastor, my church will be a mirrored image of whatever I am. If I put the emphasis on the Word of God, if I hold the line with the Word of God, if I do the right things and train you the right way, then I will reproduce in you what the Word of God says needs to be. It is foolproof.

This is why the Bible in the book of 1 Timothy—now 1 Timothy is a great book, 1 and 2 Timothy—because in that book, and we are going to talk about that when we get a little farther down the line, not today but down the line in our study, in the book of Timothy, Paul had won Timothy to Christ, and Timothy looks at him as his father in the Lord. Paul looks at him as his son in the Lord. You will find in those two books, they are called the pastoral epistles from the higher education crowd. The reason why they are is because that is where Paul teaches Timothy the basic concept of being a pastor. Timothy is the model pastor in the New Testament, not Paul, it is Timothy. That is why in the book of Timothy, you will find all of the qualifications for the pastorate, you will find all the character qualities for it, and you will find all the aspects. It is in that book that you find this plan of God, which as a parent reproduces themselves in their children, a pastor reproduces himself in the church.

Just like if a parent does not get involved in a kid's life, does not get into the Word of God with them, the kids turn up and they run worldward, the same way with a pastor. If he does not spend time with his people, if he does not teach time with the Word of God, then they are going to grow up, and they are never going to be grounded in the Word of God. That is why from time and beginning, I have always told you, I will spend an hour a week with anybody that wants to learn the Bible. I will give you an hour of my time every week for you to grow and learn where you can ask any question you want to ask, and you can get whatever information you want about anything. I do not care. Whatever is important to you is important to me. It is not for me to decide what is important for you. My job is to be there for you when you have questions about the issues of life that you do not have answers to. That is my job, my only job.

As you come through the book of Timothy, you see this parallel so clearly. You see it that what he says in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 4, he says, talking about being a bishop or a pastor:

1 Timothy 3:4

One that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? That is a basic principle. If you cannot get your kids to church on Sunday, if you cannot get your kid to do what is right, if you cannot follow the process of getting your life working and your home working, you will never do it when it comes to a church. That is just a basic fundamental concept.

Then he says in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 8:

1 Timothy 5:8

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Certainly he is not saying he is an infidel, but he is saying that is a very important principle. Taking care of your family, getting working, paying the bills, providing for your family, providing spiritually, emotionally, physically, all of those things are basic principles by which everything in the ministry is built on, and God's plan is foolproof. As we go through our study, you will see these parallels so clearly and will help you be a better parent and in turn a better Christian as you grow in your relationship with the Lord.

III. The Word of God as a Balanced Diet

If you are going to grow, you have got to have something to eat. You do not grow without eating. I found coming through the Bible, once you enter into this study, it just never ends. It is like all the studies in the Bible because the Bible is an eternal book; the study is eternal; you can go as long as you want to go with it. I know that when you begin to grow, you have got to have a diet to grow.

Another study that just comes to light as you come through the Word of God is how the Bible is a well-balanced diet.

- In the Word of God, the Bible is likened to water in John 4.
- It is likened to honey in Psalms 119.
- It is likened to meat in Hebrews 5.
- It is likened to apples in Proverbs 7.
- It is likened to bread in Luke 4.
- It is likened to milk in 1 Peter 2.
- It is likened to vegetables in Psalms 78.

You know what you have got in the Word of God? You have got a well-balanced diet by which if you partake of this diet, you will grow spiritually.

My mom always had one problem with me, and it was the same problem your mom has with you. If you are a little kid right now, because you are not in here, but I am telling you right now, it is the same problem your mom and dad got with you right now: you do not eat the way you should. I never did. When I close my eyes and I think of my mom and how much I love her and all my warm times at home, the only thing that comes through my mind is, "Bob, don't spoil your

supper!" Because that is what I was famous for doing. I would come in, and I knew where the candy was, or I knew what this was, and I knew what that was, and I always wanted to eat the wrong things that are the right thing, and that is just the way that it works. We have raised a whole generation of what I call junk food Christians. They do not get any stability in the Word of God. They never get time to really learn the Bible and all of the balanced diet that it does for them. They never grow properly because they never have the proper diet. They seemingly get lost in the seven concepts of spiritual growth, and they never really become all that God wants them to do.

The seven stages of spiritual growth is the road to God's perfect will in your life. Remember, I told you before, this is what the church focuses on. This is what the church looks at. These things are outward, and the reason why they are outward is because you cannot fake true spirituality. I do not care who you are. I have never in 30 years of ministry ever seen anybody that was able to fake true spirituality because there are just too many bases to cover, and you cannot cover them all.

IV. The Word of God as a Two-Edged Sword

I remember one time, and I have told this story to some of you. I remember one of my favorite stories, and a long time ago, for years and years and years, I really did not understand this, and I was too intimidated to ask anybody about it. But it is a story back in with Solomon. It is a familiar story once I say it, because some of you heard me say it before, but even if you have not, you probably know the story.

Solomon was supposedly the wisest man that ever lived. He is sitting on the throne in Jerusalem, and the Bible says one day there come in and they bring two women. These women have a baby. Solomon is supposed to be the wisest judge, and for the life of me, I looked at this and thought to myself, "Wow, what is this all about?" Here is the story. They bring two women in with one baby, and one woman says, "Hey, look, we both had babies in the middle of the night. My baby died," or however, "and this is my baby." The other woman says, "No, it is the other way. This is really my baby." Solomon did not know those women. He did not have a clue who was telling the truth.

You find yourselves in life in those kinds of situations. I have people come in to me and sit down and talk with them all the time, and somebody says, "He says," and "She says," and it is back and forth. It really does not matter to me who is right, who is wrong, because that is not really the issue. I never care where somebody is at. My only concern is, "Do you want to do what is right from where you are at now?" If you do, it does not make any difference who is right or wrong. All that matters is, we solve the problem, not treat the symptoms.

I looked at this story where there are two women standing out here. Solomon did not know who they were. He did not have time to run a criminal background check on them to see who is who. They show up down there, and they are both saying, "This is my baby," and they are telling a good, convincing story, and he is on the throne. He has got to make a decision because court that day is filled up. So he calls for a sword, and he says, "Cut the baby in half, give half to her, give

half to her, that will fix the problem." The men and he said that the woman whose baby it was got revealed. Why? Because she really cared about her baby, and she would have rather seen her baby go to another mother than to be killed.

The wisdom behind that is unbelievable. But there is a greater principle there because we know from the Bible in Hebrews chapter 4 that the Word of God is like a sharp two-edged sword.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

You cannot fake true spirituality. You cannot. That is why when somebody is under the authority of the Word of God, this old sword, this old book, always produces the truth of the way things are. That is basically why men do not like the Bible. That is why people shun away from the Bible. That is why people want to go everywhere else, but they really do not want to come to the place in many cases that can really solve their problem because the Bible does not play around. The Bible is very clear, it is very black and white, and it is very, "This is the way it is, this is what you need to do. If you want to fix it, here is how we fix it." Of course, that is the whole concept, and you cannot fake spirituality in any way, shape, or form. Because there are too many bases to cover. You just cannot be thinking that fast all the time because the time you think you have got it covered over here, it will leak out over here.

That is why these seven stages of spiritual growth are so crucial for leadership in the church. Because the man that rises up to the top as far as leadership, or the woman who finds a position of leadership, whatever the case, it is something that is not based on how much they know about the Bible. It is not based on whose friends they are. It is not based on how much time they hang out with the preacher. It is simply based on one book that simply lays down a criteria, and either you fit it or you do not. If you do not, then conform yourself to fit it, but that is the way it has to be because the Word of God is the book.

When they looked back in the book of Acts and they were looking around for leadership in deacons and in elders, and when they sent Paul and Barnabas out, and even when the young Timothy was called to be a pastor, they did not go around and check his credentials. They did not ask him for a resume. They did not ask and look back. Everybody knew that these men were ready to do what God wanted them to do. Why? Because these seven things are outward; you see them.

V. The First Stage: Babes in Christ

With that in mind, I want you now to turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, and we are going to look at the first one here, and the first one is babes in Christ.

1 Peter 2:1-2

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

Verse 1 says, "laying aside all malice." Malice is hurting someone for your own personal gratification or your own personal gain. Guile is to disguise your craftiness. Envy, you already know what that means. Hypocrisy, you know what that means. And evil speaking, you know what that means.

The reason why you have to lay these things aside is because when you enter into the "babes in Christ" concept, that first level, that will be somebody who just got saved. That will be someone who is saved but has never really gotten into the Word of God. Nobody has helped them. It is not a bad thing to be a baby in Christ as long as you do not stay that way for too long. There should be an ongoing process in your life of learning. There should be somebody in your life as a young baby that helps you and helps you figure things out because the ultimate goal is to get you ready to minister the Word of God to somebody else.

I might as well tell you this too: nowhere in the Word of God does the Word of God ever recognize or ever lend any kind of legitimacy to anybody who is not actively involved in teaching somebody else the Word of God, whether it be your own family, whether it be your wife, whether it be somebody that you win to Christ that you are working with in your life, it does not make any difference. That is why the things of malice, guile, envy, hypocrisies, and evil speaking have to go. You have to lay them aside because the ministry, over there in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, you do not have to turn to that, but the ministry in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 1 is this:

2 Corinthians 4:1

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 Corinthians 4:3

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

There is the ministry right there. That is the greatest definitive verse anywhere in the Bible on the ministry. The ministry is:

8. Renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty.
9. Not walking in craftiness or handling the Word of God deceitfully.
10. By manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

What does that jumble of words there, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience," mean? It simply means what you see is what you get. As a Christian, you need to be as transparent as you can be. There needs to be nothing hidden. When somebody sees you, they

ought to see the Word of God, and they ought to see what the Word of God is working in your life. That ought to be the goal. You cannot ever pastor, you cannot ever be a leader if that part of you is not there because people see right through you. That is why you have to lay aside the malice, lay aside the guile, lay aside all the things that we use to mask the things that we do not want people to see about us.

The Word of God is like a light. It says a light that shines in a dark place. The Word of God illuminates who we are and shows the cracks and the crevices that we got when you expose yourself to the Word of God and to people. That is why the ministry has to be one of absolute openness and honesty. You have to be able to see what is real. You have to be able to ask any question you want to ask about anything. The moment a pastor gets defensive because you are asking something about this or that, then you better get suspect. The ministry is just like that. It is being open and honest that if you have nothing to hide, there is nothing to hide. The Word of God is clearly everything that people see.

So he says, first of all, "laying aside all this stuff," and then in verse 2, "as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby." The first concept we are talking about here is babes who desire the sincere milk of the Word. Milk in the Bible is the basic concepts of the Word of God. Milk in the Bible is the easy stuff, but it is where everybody has to start.

I look back in my life constantly where I am at now, and I am not where I need to be obviously, but I look at where I am at now, but I am a lot farther than what it was the day I first walked into church with a Bible in my arm. I was so stupid I thought Noah's wife was Jonah Ark. I am not kidding you. I thought apostles and epistles were husband and wife. I did not know anything about the Bible. I never forget, I started going to Bible study on Thursday night, back then our Bible study was on Thursday night, and I started to just be overwhelmed by what they were talking about. I just could not grasp it all. I really wanted to learn. I had come out of a life of sin, and I just got out of the army, and I did not want that lifestyle anymore, and God had done some events in my life, and He really had changed some things about me, and I really wanted to do what is right, but I did not have a clue.

I went out and bought me a wide margin Bible just like some of you got, and I enjoyed it, but I did not know what to do with it. I tried to read the Bible, and I got just confused. I tried to figure things out, and I could not figure it out. I would go there, I would keep going, I would keep listening, but I just could not. They were talking on a level that was so far over my head because of where I was that in time, it was enough that it could swamp somebody.

God put a man in my life, and this man was a young marriage director at the time, a nice guy, still a friend today, pastor of a church up in Massachusetts. God put this guy in my life, and he saw me, and he saw my struggling, and he said, "Bob, why don't we go out on Thursday night," or "why don't we go out on Tuesday night it was, and why don't we go out make some calls together?" I said, "Sure, that would be fine, I would love to do that." In the process, he taught me a lot about how to talk to people, because I did not have that skill, not that I have it now, but I have it better than I had it then. He taught me how to talk to people. He taught me how to, and I saw situations where, then I am pretty soon, I would compare myself that we would go in, and he

would not let me say, I did not say anything. I would just sit there and listen, but I was making mental notes. I would watch, and after a while, I was answering in my mind what I thought the answer would be, trying to find out sometimes I was writing something.

Then one night he did an incredible thing, and I just never got over it. He was talking to some young couple, and he was talking to them about something, and he looked at me and he says, "Bob, why don't you give them a testimony of what God has done in your life?" My first preaching opportunity. I will never forget that as long as I live. It was one of those things where I was like the guy that was on a football team that was sitting on the bench for nine games, and every time the coach looked my way, I reached down and grabbed my helmet, but then he walked by and put somebody else in. There I was, the last game of the season, and he called my number, and he said, "Why don't you tell?" I do not remember what I said. I hope it was good, but I will never forget, I was not nervous. It was just like it was an instantaneous thing that the Spirit of God came over me, and I just told them. I did not try to flower it up. I did not try to make it professional. I just tried to tell in my heart what God had done for me, and that was the greatest time in my life.

That old boy was bringing me along. He knew I did not know what I was doing, but he let me experience it for a while, and then he let me inject something in, and then after we were done, he told me that was really good, that really helped them. That made me feel, for the first time in my life, I felt like I helped somebody. I was not just taking from somebody all the time. I helped, and then on we went, and pretty soon I was making calls by myself. Pretty soon, from all the other things that God had put in my life, there was a process that began to go in my life, and I am telling you, that is exactly it. Being a newborn babe simply means you start with the milk, and you do not be embarrassed about it. So you do not know. So you have been saved five years, six years, seven years, ten years, and you do not really understand the Bible. It is okay. The question is, when do you want to begin to learn? I do not care where anybody is at. I do not care where they have been. I just care about what you want to do today, and where you want to go from this point. That is all that really matters.

There was a time, and I touched on this a couple of weeks ago, there was a time when the safest place for a baby was in the mother's womb. It was a time where it was absolutely, totally, completely safe from just about everything. Then around the 1970s, a court reversal, Roe versus Wade, changed all of that. Now abortions, clinics can take babies. It is not the safest place anymore, because of all the drugs and all the alcohol and all the drugs that are ingested, and the HIV syndrome and everything there. Now babies are born with all kinds of deficiencies. The womb is no longer the safest place for a baby to be, though in God's plan it was.

In the same token, there was a time when the church was the safest place for a young baby Christian. A place where that Christian could come and get any answer. A place where he could come, and the first thing you heard out of the preacher's mouth was not, "How much are you going to give today? Have you got your, you got saved? Great! Did you get your tithing envelopes? We get them on the way out, okay?" That is not what he heard. What he heard was the Word of God broken down and the opportunity to begin to learn the Bible and grow through the Bible and get everything that he needed in his life. Those days are gone. Those days are gone.

There are not many churches today that care enough about where you are at. All they care about is what you can do for them.

Somehow, and I do not fully understand this, pastors today have got the whole thing reversed. They think that the church exists for you to do something for them. The church exists for the church to do something for you. There is nothing that you have to offer. It is what the church has to offer to you to build you to the place where then you can give back spiritually what God has given to you. That is where it starts. It starts with babies.

Every church should have a nursery, a physical one and a spiritual one. There should be a place in every church where the newborn babes get taken care of. We are in a place where we have that, so you bring them in here in a little car seat. I love it. I think it is the greatest thing in the world. I like when they squawk. I like when they squall. I think that is great. I think that to me always reminds me of what this church ought to be, and that it is winning people to Christ and having spiritual babes that we have to take care of.

VI. Characteristics of Spiritual Babes

Let us face it. I raised two kids. My wife and I raised two kids. Many of you raised kids. We all know about babies. Babies can be, I love my grandbabies more than anything else in the world. One of the greatest things I love about them? I can send them home at night when it is done. I do not mean that in a bad way. I just mean that in a way that that is just the way it is. I love them. I love little Maddie. We go for little walks and talks. We sit on the thing, and Grandpa shows you the squirrels, and you cannot quite get that 20 gauge up to her shoulder yet, but we are working on it. Little Mackenzie, she just looks at me like, "Who are you?" She smiles and gives me high fives and all that stuff. I love kids, and the older I get, the more I enjoy them, and I enjoy the kids in the church. I love hugging on them. I love just, I like to see them coming to church. I like them seeing Karen, a little by, I like to see them trotting off down here holding hands. I like to see that, that is just great.

But let us face it, that is the good stuff, but babies are work. They may be the sweetest little thing in the world, and those little pictures you got, little fuzzies all around them, but let us be honest. They are all self-centered. They all think the world only revolves around them, and they want you to conform yourself to their schedule, not yours. While you are looking there, tickle a little stomach, and they are smiling and giggling and screaming little things and laughing, and everybody is always, "Oh, they are the cutest in the world." The baby is saying, "Yeah, I may be tiny, but I got the lungs the size of Texas."

You have to change their diapers. That can be an interesting deal, especially if you have three dogs. I am not going to go any farther than that with that one, but you can put the pieces together. You have to learn they throw up a lot on you. That is just the way it is. They cry a lot. They have a very low threshold of understanding. They demand constant attention. When they do not want to be laid down, you have nothing to say about it. The only alternative you have is some big shooting muffs you put on your ears and walk around the house. Constant care. Loud noises scare them. Their understanding of things is basically based on your voice inflection.

I have never tried this experience with my kids because I got a wife that is never too far away, and my daughters would kill me, but I tried it on my dogs. There are a lot of similarities. I will walk into the house, and there is big old Buddy sitting on the couch. Buddy is guilty of everything in the world. You look at him and say, "They just bombed the Twin Towers." He puts his tail to his legs and runs under the thing. He did it. The other two dogs are always blaming him, but is not that the way little kids are? I am sure they are. I will walk in there and I will say, "Buddy, I am going to reach over here and get a big knife, and I am going to cut your head off slowly, and I am going to hold it up for all the other dogs to see. The next time you get in the wastebasket and you eat that stuff in there, they are going to know better." His tail is wagging. He is looking at me. He is just thinking the whole violent world. I will walk in again and I will say, "Buddy, I love you, and I want to hug you and walk you, and I got a big old bone out in the garage for you, and come here, and I give it to you." He is gone.

The babies are. I will go up to the house, and I will go upstairs, and there will be Maddie, or I will get in, and I will say something, but I am going to say it too loud. You are scared of her. I am saying, "Well, what was that? Quiet? I just scared her. You are scaring me." It is loud. They have a low threshold of understanding. They do not understand. They do not figure it out. Everything around them is relative to what they can just barely, your voice inflections and what you say and what you do, your body language, and they are just, and it is an absolute problem, and young Christians are the same way. They do not understand a lot of things. You have got to be careful when you witness or you preach. You have got to be careful what you say.

I am constantly trying to be aware whenever I am preaching on Sunday of who my audience is. Not that there is anything that I would not say if anybody was here, but it is just the fact that how I say it because I do not want to confuse young Christians. So I may back up. Somebody may say, "Well, what is he backing up and doing that for? I already know that." Well, maybe you do, but maybe somebody else does not, and I do not ever want to get in a place where I start talking to one people level where the young, you cannot do that. Not in a family. That is why families go dysfunctional. Mom and dad do not talk. Mom and dad and the kids do not talk. Dad and kids do not talk, and nobody talks. All they hear is the TV or the stereo or whatever the case, and nobody has any communication at all; it gets lost in the noise. You cannot have that here. There are people from all different levels here. When you leave here today, I am not expecting you to understand everything, but I want you to leave here with me being able to be understanding where you are at and breaking it down where you can get it, that you leave with what you need. I am not into this thing, "Well, let us just talk about the deep thing." No, we can talk about a whole range of things as long as you understand your audience is not all on the same level. We are a family this morning.

The biggest problem babies have over everything else I already talked about is the fact that they cannot feed themselves. They really cannot. They are totally dependent on somebody else. When they are little, little babies, they get milk, formula, whatever, as they come through the process of growth. It does not have to be much. By the time they are two or three years old, you can buy that. You put a little applesauce on the end of your finger, or get something a little bit later on. You go buy that Gerber stuff that just looks like Gerber stuff, and little bottles. The peas are all

mashed up. As time goes on, you get those little beanie weenies in those little cans. I really still like those. I never got rid of those in my life. They stick them in their brother's ear, and they throw them on the floor, and the dog really gets interested in babies at that point because they feed them on there. Then you take them out a little bit later, and then you are not, then they have got children's portions meals, one french fry at a time. You take them out. When you buy them the food, you know what you have got to do? They can get a hamburger, but you have got to cut it up. You have got to cut the fries up. Oh, do not ever get, do not ever take them and let them get spaghetti. That will be a showstopper. Everybody in a restaurant, the tents will be over there where your kids go, "Hey!" You feel like an idiot. Your wife is over there going, "And I am not concerned about her. I am concerned about everybody else," and I am standing around saying, "Hey, it is okay. It is all right." "She has these. She has got this problem. She is learning spaghetti. I am really sorry. It is okay. Go on with your meal. Yeah, it is all right. It is all right. We will put it, it is terrible." Then however it comes down, here is how it ends: your wife says, "You did not cut her food up!" Like it is my job. Cut it up.

You know what the process of discipleship is? It is real simple. When you start to work with people, when I start, I worked with a number of you all week long. My basic job is to let you ask any question you want to ask about the Bible. Study whatever you want to study. Allow you to do whatever in your life you want to do, and then all I really do, honest to goodness, all I do is take a knife and a fork and cut up the big pieces so you can understand it. That is all. That is my job. My job is not to be a great Bible teacher. My job is not to be this or that. My job is simply when people come to me with the Word of God, wherever level you are on, is to take a knife and a fork and spiritually cut it up so you can digest the pieces so you do not choke on it. That is exactly what, when you get to a point in your life, what you will deal with people. It is the one-on-one concept. Always being mindful of who you are talking to. Always understanding that these people are coming from a background here, or this person here is where he is at here, or she is where she is at here, and they do not understand this, and then being sympathetic to that, but yet at the same time putting them in an atmosphere of biblical growth that helps them grow. I do not care how long it takes. I do not care. That is immaterial as long as the progress is being made.

VII. The Discipline Stage: Foundation of Growth

The greatest thing that you can do in a baby's life, and this is not only spiritually but physically, because the only thing you can accomplish in a baby's life up to a period of time—we are going to give you some ages here—but the only thing you can do in a baby's life is accomplish the concept of discipline. That is where it starts. I know you would not think that is true, but that is true. Anybody who does any kind of work with children knows from the time they are born, say eight months, up to the first three years of their life, a child by the time he is three years old, four years old, depending on every child a little different, he has got the character traits of how he is going to be the rest of his life are sealed. He is not going to add anything to them. That is why so many parents miss the boat with their kids, and now in the line someplace when they are 14 or 15, 16 years old, they are wondering what they are going to do with them. That is why in many times in churches, somebody is saved 10, 15 years, who everybody thinks is spiritual, suddenly

goes off the wall and you have problems simply because you have got to understand that that infant form, the only thing you can really accomplish—I mean, I know you accomplish love and all that stuff—I am talking about for his growth process, the thing that you have to nail down and focus on is discipline because for the time eight months to three years old, he is going to have all the patterns of his character down.

Within this period, we will say eight months to 24 months, you start to see the old sin nature. That baby is not as cute as you think he is, she is, they are, but there is something there. You start to see how conceited they really are. You start to see how they want when they want, and let me tell you something, there comes a time when they are real, real little infants that you have got to follow that thing through. I know when he is hungry, you do not say it is not time to eat on Thursday. I am not talking about that. I am talking about understanding and being able to divide out what is or what is not because the kid cannot. If you do not, I have seen it so many times, I have seen it so many times where a parent will come over, they will leave the baby or young child with somebody, and they will start to go, and the kid does not want to be by himself, so they start to leave, and the kid will cry. The parent will make one big mistake: they will go back. When they go back, you think the kid is being soothed because you are back? No, no, no, he is moving to the other kid back there, "How many times can we get away with this? How many times will I cry, will she keep coming back?" And he plays it. If you do not think they do, I will tell you, you train them by what you do. If you are going to take them someplace, you leave them there, and if they are real small, okay, I am talking about to get over, you leave them there, and when they start, "Mommy, don't go, don't go, don't go!" You say, "You know what, Mommy has got to go, so we are going to be back. You have a good time." Because you know what happens? When you leave, you are gone three minutes, and the kid is fine, he is having a ball. You are saying, "Mommy will be back," and he is saying, "Who is Mommy? I am having too much fun. I do not care." But you see, they train us. They train us.

I used to teach a class on how many times do you want to tell your kid to do something before he does it? The kid will learn by your voice inflections how many. My mother did the same thing, and I got to know it is when her voice went up two octaves, got a lot louder, that people next door thought the air raid sirens were going off, and you could tell by the tone of her voice it was time to go. Up to that point, you had four, five, six, seven, eight, "I am not going to tell you again." Every one of those, you just catalog that means four more. "Not going to tell you again." Okay, guys, we have got three more. "Not going to tell you again." Got two more. Keep going. "Not going to tell you again." We got maybe one, maybe two, depends on our mood today. Let us go, let us go. You train them. They learn.

Discipline is the concept because within that period, eight to 24 months, you begin to see the child's old sin nature. This is when they begin to test authority, and this is where they begin to train their parents. I am telling you, believe it or not, this is when the transfer of power really takes place of the child being in control of your family or you being in control of your child. I know it is 16 and 17, 18 when they do not do it right. No, no, no, no, no, that is just the official ceremony of an event that took place a long time ago when you passed the rule of power because

you did not understand that discipline has to be for. You know what the root word for discipline is? It is disciple. When you disciple somebody, you are training them in a discipline.

I do not know how many times in the academic world, especially in the area of medicine or philosophy, somebody will say, "What do you study?" And they will say, "I am studying philosophy." And I will say, "Oh, what discipline?" "Well, I am studying medicine." "Oh, really, what discipline?" That is a word that we use in higher academics because it suggests that if you are going to study philosophy, you are going to pick out one philosopher and you are going to study his style or his concept or maybe two or three of them, and you are going to discipline your concepts of philosophy based on what that philosopher said. If you are going to go into medicine, which is a huge field, you can go into a million different fields, but when you take a specific discipline, then you are focusing on this particular aspect of medicine, whether it is heart, whether it is babies, whether it is pediatrics, whether it is whatever the case, and you are going to be, that is going to be your strong point, and you are going to discipline yourself to that.

When you become a disciple of Jesus Christ, then you discipline yourself to His teachings. When you test why the Bible says, "Train up a child," you train him when he is young. You begin to get into his life and understand that there are certain concepts that you have to instill in this process that builds from leadership right on down the line and builds everything in his life. When you get to the point when you are dealing with a baby's life, you begin to lay the foundation of discipline. You begin to lay the foundation that you are going to build upon the rest of his life as he gets older.

When you are dealing with a baby Christian, you are dealing with the foundational stuff. You are laying down the foundation of discipline, Bible principles, Bible teachings, and the Bible calls it the milk of the word. That is what he is saying in Peter; he is talking about that the babies desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby. So you deal with them when you are dealing with a little baby, and he is about the age of Maddie, two years old, three years old, you begin to structurally discipline her. You tell her what she can do and what she cannot. How many times you get away with it before she actually does it is your parenting skills.

I know there is a lot of problem, not just categorically, there is a lot of issues that go in here. I know that moms work all day, they come home, they are tired. Dads do not help, or dads do it and moms do not, whatever, there is a whole bunch of variations here. I am not just giving you a blanket statement. I understand that in the issues of life, there are a lot of circumstances that come in, but what I am saying, the biblical concept principles are at work here: discipline.

When I take a young Christian, I deal with the milk of the word. I want him to know what happened the day they got saved. I do not want him to wonder about it. I do not want him to let somebody else fill in the blanks. I want him to know what actually transpired. I am not talking about the terminology. Somebody said, "Well, I got born again," "Well, I got blood washed in the blood," "Well, I got this, I got that." That is terminology. I am saying, do you actually know what took place inside your body the day you got saved? I want you to know that. I want you to understand the concept of eternal security, why you cannot lose your salvation. I want you to understand the concept of your standing in state. I want you to understand the concept of

fellowship with Christ. I want you to understand the great principles of Romans 8:28, 1 John 5, 1 John 2, 1 John 3. I want you to be, and it is not deep stuff, it is basic milk stuff, but it is stuff where you have to start to grow. Just like little Maddie, "Maddie, don't touch that. Maddie, say thank you. Maddie, do this. Maddie, don't do this. Maddie, get off the dog. Maddie, put that bat away. Maddie, is that gun loaded?" Maddie, you have got to follow some discipline concepts.

Let me show you what happens to a Christian or a church, and you can make your own parallels for children, when this is not accomplished. Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. We are done, but I want to show you this.

1 Corinthians chapter 3. The church at Corinth is a great model for us because the church at Corinth is the worst church in the New Testament. You remember Paul writes to seven churches. Those seven churches will show you seven characteristics of churches in different spiritual growth concepts. You bet you they will. The church at Corinth is the church of babies. It is the most problematic church in the New Testament. The whole book of 1 Corinthians is nothing but Paul going through verse by verse, chapter by chapter, showing their spiritual immaturity and trying to tell them, "You need to be farther along in your life than this. You are having problems that you ought not to have for as long as you have been in existence as a church."

Now he says in 1 Corinthians 3:1:

1 Corinthians 3:1

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

That is a terrible thing to have to say to somebody. That is a hard thing to say. He is saying, "I would like to deal with you like I deal with all the other churches, but I cannot because you are baby Christians, you are babes in Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:2

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

Now meat in the Bible is doctrine. It is the strong doctrine of the Bible.

1 Corinthians 3:3

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

That is a great word. Now we see a Bible definition of immaturity: carnality. You bet you. You can call it whatever you want, you can put it wherever you want to put it. The Bible defines immaturity as carnality. You are carnal. You refuse to grow past some point in your life. "For you are yet carnal, and where there is among you envying, strife, divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?" Here is a church that would walk around like men, claiming to be spiritual people, when in actuality they are babes in Christ, and Paul says they are carnal.

1 Corinthians 3:4-7

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

This church is a picture of what happens when you do not grow, and there are thousands of churches like this across the world today. I knew a friend of mine had a church; he never spent the time disciplining anybody, never worked with anybody, never trained any leadership, and he was a great preacher, he was a great teacher, but he would put people into positions without ever training them. After nine or ten years, his church was a church of spiritual babies, and there was all kinds of infighting going on, and down the line, they kicked him out, threw him out, and the church was an absolute mess, and I do not even know if it was in existence anymore today. But that is what happens. That is this church: a carnal church, a fleshy church, not built on the Spirit of God. Yet, my friend, this is in the great chapter of 1 Corinthians chapter 3, which with just a couple more verses, leads us into the judgment seat of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians chapter by chapter, let me show you what they are dealing with, and we do not have time, I am not going to go through all of them, but let me just show you. In chapter 1, here is what kind of babies they are: they are arguing about who baptized who. In other words, in this church, they are tagging some kind of spirituality based on who baptized you. If you were baptized by Paul, then you are a greater Christian than if you were baptized by Ralph Schwartz, who nobody knew. This church is such a baby church, and they are such immature Christians, playing church with all the strife and all the envies and all the stuff that is going on around them in their carnality that they have attained a spiritual tag. "Now if you will tell who baptized you, well, I was baptized by Paul, so I obviously have got some more greater spiritual gifts than you because you were baptized by a nobody." And Paul deals with the stupidity of that.

In chapter 2, the Bible says they are operating on worldly wisdom rather than God's wisdom. In chapter 3, they are arguing over who won who to Christ. Now they are tagging some kind of spirituality to the fact, "Well, Paul won you to Christ, and so and so won you to Christ, and I am a greater Christian because of the fact that Paul won me to Christ, therefore, he had some extra power." And what Paul is saying down here, it does not matter. One guy preached, one guy prayed, and God saved everybody. He brings them back to the reality of it.

I will take it one step further. In chapter 12, 13, and 14 are the great chapters on spiritual gifts. You know what the church at Corinth is doing? Tongues in the Bible are a legitimate thing. They fit in the period of the book of Acts. There are no tongues for today, but tongues in the Bible were legitimate in the book of Acts because they were a sign that was given to the nation of Israel. Israel was told to look for them. That is why tongues were for that period of time. But the church at Corinth is in existence around Acts chapter 16, 17, 18, so it is around the book of Acts.

But here is what they are doing: they have taken the concept of tongues, and they have come up with what is known as an unknown tongue, some gibber-jabber heavenly language that nobody can understand. The height of their hypocrisy, the height of their spiritual immaturity. This church would like to go into our nursery where you have got a bunch of little babies, and there are 28 little nursery things in there with full-grown guys sitting in them, laying in them, with a leg sticking out and their hand sticking out. You walked in there, you would say, "What in the world is this?" Here is a 25-year-old guy in a crib, big old legs, hairy legs hanging all over the side, got a bottle, got a diaper on. That is gross. What is wrong with this? Babies in the nursery. That is what you have got the church at Corinth.

What he is saying here is he says in chapter 12, 13, and 14, they have elevated their hypocrisy to some unknown gibber-jabber language that nobody can understand, which they are saying, "Well, this is my heavenly language. This is between me and God, and nobody can understand it because you just do not have the relationship with God that I have got. This is between me and Him." Then somebody else would get it, and then you know how it goes, "Well, God told me this," and this guy would say, "Well, God told me something great," and it is all built on your experience. Let me tell you something, true Christianity is never built on your experience. True Christianity is built on your seven stages of spiritual growth, and as you grow to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what happens when somebody stays a babe in Christ: divisions in the church, strife in the church, contentions in this church. Problems in any church will always be created and supported by baby Christians. Why? Because the more you grow, the more you realize that your job as a spiritual Christian is to be a problem-solver, not a problem-causer. You that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. You do not add the problems; you help solve problems. That is a mark of a baby Christian. Spiritual maturity, spiritual growth, you begin to see the real issues in Christianity. You begin to see what is important. You begin, like we talked about Thursday night, that exactness of understanding how the Word of God goes. The older you get in Christ, the older you get in Christ, the more you see biblical principles: how to deal with the issues of life and your marriage and your family, the issues with unsaved people and on your job, the issues of saved people that you get into conflict with, and it happens, the issues are all the world around you as you see on the news all the time, and the issues within the church. When proper growth is employed, the person becomes a leader. He becomes at a point, or she comes at a point, where they follow Christ the right way. They make the proper investment that they are supposed to make in their life, and they grow. That is exactly the way that it works.

VIII. Conclusion: Willingness to Grow

When you see the concept of babies, it is not a bad thing. I do not want you to leave here understanding that it is a bad thing. Let me say this to you: it does not matter, as I have said before, where you get plugged into the Word of God. I have known people that were saved in churches years ago that they never grew, and they came to the point when they came into my life or I met them that they wanted to know about God, they wanted to learn about God, but they did not. It does not matter where you are. It does not matter how much baggage you have got. It does

not matter what you have not learned. I do not care. That is never an issue. It only matters what you want to learn. What do you want to do from this point on? That is the spiritual growth concept. God will take anybody wherever he or she is at and help them be whatever God wants you to be. The problem is not God; the problem is us wanting to be that point, making that right investment, realizing that, "Lord, I am 40 years old, I am 30 years old, I am 20 years old, I am 50 years old. There is a judgment seat of Christ coming. I am going to have to give an account. I am having problems with my kids or having problems with my marriage. I am having problems at home. I have got to do something." Then recognizing that the Bible has the answers, and in allowing God to do whatever God can do.

I am asked this question over and over and over and over again in dealing with people. I probably, if I had a dime for every time somebody asked me this question, I could retire tomorrow. Almost instinctively, when you talk to somebody about where they are at, they are looking for help. Almost instinctively, at the end of their laying out where they are at, and they are trying to help you understand better where they are at so you can better help them, they will always ask me this question, almost always. They will always say, "Bob, well, is there anything we can do?" Hey, that is never the question because I do not care where you are at in life. I do not care how many mistakes you have made. Do you think I have not made mine? Do you think I am any better than you? We are all in the same boat together. We have all got oars, and we are trying to paddle a sea of life, and it is tough. Sometimes we do not always do it the right way. We do not always do things that are right. But the question is never, "Is there anything we can do?" The question is, "Are you willing to do what you need to do?" That is the question.

Wherever in your life you are willing to stay at, stop and say, "Okay, I am going to let the Word of God take over now." I do not care if your kids are 20 and they are out in the world, there is something you can do. I do not care if they are 15 and you are beginning to have problems, there is something you can do. I do not care if they are just newly born, there is something you can do. I do not care if they are five, six, seven, there is something you can do. It is true of a Christian's life no matter where you are at in your life. I do not care if you have never learned the Bible and you are saved for 40 years, that is immaterial. It all depends on what you want to do, where you are at, and that is what the Word, that is what spiritual growth is. It is you stepping into the arena and saying, "Okay, God, take me, make me, use me, and abuse me, but I want to get to that point where You and I are in that book the way we need to be." That is the key, and that is where it is at.

So if we start to come down through this, we looked at babies today. Next week we are going to move into the young children. You are going to see this process continue. You are going to see the principles of baby. Remember now, a baby deals with discipline. We are going to move in next week; we are going to look at the relationship factor, and we are going to see how in raising your children, how you transition from the discipline mode just as smoothly as can be into the relationship mode. How to build a relationship with your children is the same way you learn to build a relationship with Christ. I will show you next week when we get to that point. Let us pray.