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**‘Brothers, I Could Not Address You as Spiritual’
 (1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4)**

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Reading

2:¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

3 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

Introduction

1) Good morning, Church!

This morning is Palm Sunday and from here we step in to the most sacred week of the Christian year: Holy Week.

Beginning tomorrow, I’ll be posting a guide for walking with Jesus through Holy Week to the blog section of our website – one for each new day until Resurrection Sunday.

I won’t be preaching on Palm Sunday this morning because we very recently studied it.

But I think the things we’ll study together this morning will challenge us to walk into the coming week humbly, introspectively and honestly.

We've been looking at some of Jesus' most profound statements – statements that get to the very core of what it means to be a disciple.

They serve as a paradigm for the Christian life, a life which Jesus lived for us in prototype.

In them we also see the only divinely-appointed path toward fulfilling the will of God for our lives.

If we follow it, we'll reproduce our life in Christ – we'll bear fruit for the Kingdom.

If we ignore it, we will abide, spiritually, alone and lose rewards.

Our Lord does an amazing thing here.

In verse **24**, He describes *why HE must die*: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was only a few days away from this ‘falling into the earth.’

But then, in verse **25**, Jesus shifted to the idea that *His disciples [us] must die* too: “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

We saw this same theme in **Luke 14:27**, where our Lord said, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

So, we discussed how Jesus is calling us to follow Him *in death* – death to ourselves – in order that we might truly live for Him.

Death, then, becomes THE necessary prerequisite to really living!

The very purpose for a believer remaining on this earth after his or her salvation is to bear much fruit – we'll see that when we get to **John 15**.

But here Jesus shows us that fruitfulness in the Christian life requires a death first – our own!

That's why Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:31**, "I die every day" (ESV) or 'I die daily' (NASB95).

And that's not just Paul's personal experience; it's actually *the template for the Christian life* – the standard for the life of everyone who calls Jesus his or her Lord.

- 2) Last week, we began unpacking Jesus' statement that a believer should not 'love' his life and should actually "hate his life in this world."

Clearly, *God's* will for our life – *His* agenda and *His* purposes – must be more important to us than our own, or else we're not following Him, no matter how much we might insist we are.

Jesus's words are very strong here.

'Not loving our lives' we've called the 'Bad Love.'

'Hating our lives' we've called the 'Good Hate.'¹

So, let's dig a little deeper into this astonishing verse, **John 12:25**.

First, Jesus talks about the 'Bad Love' – loving one's 'life.'

✠ The first thing we should note is the word translated 'loves.'

Predictably, the word translated "loves" here is *not* ἀγαπάω, but φιλέω.

While ἀγαπάω refers to *unconditional love* – God's love in **John 3:16** – this word, φιλέω, refers to what I would call '*friendship love*.'

In verb form, as it's found here, it means *to have deep affection* for someone or something.²

So, it's perhaps clearer to translate it that way: 'Whoever *has deep affection for his life* loses it.'

¹ As Dr. Bruner labels it. Bruner, Frederick Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 714–15.

² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988).

‡ And then, as we closed last time, we began discussing the word for ‘life’ Jesus used here: *what is He asking us not to love, and even to hate?* We looked at several words translated ‘life’ in the New Testament:

βίος, from which we get the word *biology*, refers to our *biological life*.³

We agreed that Jesus is not suggesting that we should hate our biological life, the fact that we’re alive.

Then there’s ζωή, the word that often indicates our eternal life – the life that comes from faith alone in Jesus Christ.⁴

I call this the *exuberant, forever life*.

It should be obvious that Jesus is not asking us to hate the life He gave us at our new birth!

Then we saw that Jesus used neither βίος, nor ζωή here.

He used a different word, ψυχή.

And ψυχή is a word that means *soul* or our *natural life*.

This word refers to *the life we had in Adam before we were saved*.

Jesus says, we must not *keep on* ‘loving’ or ‘having deep affection for’ [*present active participle* of φιλέω] our ψυχή, the life we had in Adam before we were saved.

Instead, we should *keep on* ‘hating’ [*present active participle* of μισέω] the life we had in Adam before we were saved.

This is the GOOD HATE.

μισέω (“hates”) is a strong word; it means *to hate* or *despise* a thing.

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 176–77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Arndt, Danker, Bauer, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 430.

So, the object of the ‘bad love’ and the ‘good hate’ is our ψυχή – everything related to our former life in Adam, our ‘natural man.’

3) In **1 Corinthians 2 & 3**, Paul uses the word ψυχή this way.

He writes, “The natural person [ψυχικός, the adjective form of ψυχή] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God [τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ], for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually [πνευματικῶς in adverb form here] discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person [πνευματικός, the adjective form of πνεῦμα] judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one ... ^{3:1} But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people [πνευματικός, the adjective form of πνεῦμα], but as people of the flesh [σάρκινος from σάρξ], as infants [νήπιος, which refers to beings ranging from fetal status to puberty] in Christ” (**1 Corinthians 2:14-15, 3:1**).

So, notice a few things about the “natural man,” the ψυχικός man:

- ✠ This person “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him” (**1 Corinthians 2:14a**).
- ✠ This person “is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (**1 Corinthians 2:14b**).

Then, in **3:1-2**, Paul says he could not speak to the Corinthians as ‘spiritual.’

^{3:1} But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people [πνευματικός], but as people of the flesh [σάρκινος], as infants [νήπιος] in Christ.”

The word translated infants, νήπιος, refers to children ranging in age from *fetal status to puberty*.

He continues: “I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready ...” (**1 Corinthians 3:1-2**).

Believers who live their life in Adam, carnal Christians, are spiritual *babies* – Paul calls them “infants (νήπιος) in Christ.”

They are babies even though they may have been saved for 20 years!

Spiritual Babies

1) Now, let's be clear: these people ARE BROTHERS, yet they're infants. Nobody likes to be called a baby, right?

So, what exactly is an "infant in Christ"?

Well, thankfully, God's Word does not leave this a mystery!

In **Hebrews 5**, the writer, probably Apollos, was speaking about some pretty heavy stuff – things like Jesus "being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (**Hebrews 5:10**).

But then stops short and says,

"About this ['order of Melchizedek'] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child [*νήπιος, a child anywhere from fetal status to puberty*].¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature [*τέλειος, having reached the goal*], for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (**Hebrews 5:11-14**).

Now, there's a question here.

It's possible that the recipients here are believers who *once had* an appetite for the Word of God, but who have regressed back to spiritual infancy.

They have "*become* dull of hearing" (**Hebrews 5:11**).

Or, it could be that the constant rejection of "solid food" has left them sluggish.

The more they rejected solid spiritual food, the duller they *became*.

Either way, these believers *are* infants in Christ – the writer tells us so in **Hebrews 5:13**.

There, the **νήπιος** (the *infant in Christ*) is described as a believer who is fed solely with the milk of elementary teaching, while the **τέλειος** (or the *mature believer*) is fed with solid food (advanced doctrinal instruction).⁵

Spiritual infants view spiritual things through *the eyes of a child*, while mature believers see things through *the eyes of Christ*.⁶

- 2) Advancing to spiritual maturity is really important to the Kingdom of God, because it's mature believers – those who regularly die to themselves – who bear fruit for the Lord and help Him to bring in the elect.

Conversely, infants in Christ often hurt others.

They are selfish, as all children are.

They insist on their own way, rather than considering the needs and opinions of others.

They have no concept of what it means to die to self.

And the fact that they have lots of zeal but little wisdom, can be disastrous!

They can be a liability, rather than an asset, to the work of God.

That, we'll see, is exactly what was happening in Corinth.

Let's take a quick peek back and see:

Paul writes: “I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?”

⁵ *Op. cit.*, Arndt, Danker, Bauer, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 671.

⁶ Upon their head, the “helmet of salvation” is firmly fixed – their thoughts are informed by their life in Christ (Ephesians 5:17). And, along with the “shield of faith,” it protects them from “*all* the flaming darts of the evil one” (Ephesians 5:16).

What characterized the life of these believers?

Jealousy. Strife. Division. Sectarianism.

These are *not* the fruits of the Spirit; they are the fruits of *immaturity*.

This is why it is so vital to the mission of the Church that God’s people grow to full maturity.

And so, Paul wrote: “[God has given the Church] the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers [literally, *the shepherd-teachers*⁷],¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ...” (**Ephesians 4:11-15**).

OK, back to **Hebrews 5**.

So, according to the writer of Hebrews, who are the spiritual babies in the Church?

✠ First, they are those who are “dull of hearing.”

Now, there’s no question that the doctrine of Christ’s high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is *advanced* doctrine!

Apollos admits it’s “difficult to explain”; it’s complex (**Hebrews 5:11**).

⁷ In the Greek, “pastors and teachers” are governed by the same (one) article (“the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers”): **τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους**) strongly implying that Paul is describing two characteristics of the same person, the *teaching-shepherd*. Thus, Barth [Karl Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:438] translates the two as “teaching shepherds.” Therefore, many contemporary churches designate their senior leader as the “pastor/teacher,” appealing to Ephesians 4:11 as the basis for this title. The idea is not without controversy though! Dr. Arnold Clinton writes: “The Granville Sharp rule, sometimes invoked for supporting the identity of pastors and teachers, does not apply to this construction. Dan Wallace, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the function of the Greek article when it appears with multiple substantives, has pointed out that the rule does not apply when the article appears with plural substantives. The pastors and teachers are therefore not to be identified as referring to one group of gifted ministers in the church” (Arnold, Clinton E., *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p. 260).

But here's the thing: the reason they couldn't understand it is *not* their inability.

With the Spirit's help we can understand even the deep things of God.

The reason why they could understand it is that they were “dull of hearing.”

The word translated “dull” (νωθρός) means ‘sluggish.’

This word reflected their spiritual state.

Hearing in the Bible is always associated with *obeying*.

The wilderness generation – which the writer of **Hebrews** discusses in detail in **3:7–4:11** – was characterized by this same ‘dullness of hearing.’

Though God's message was clearly communicated by Moses, that generation refused to *hear with obedience*.

And the Greek construction here is interesting.

The phrase ‘of hearing’ is plural in the Greek and “could also be rendered “in the ears.”⁸

He's saying, ‘You're not getting this because you're *dull in the ears!*’

Apollos, or whoever wrote Hebrews, is clearly trying to shame these believers!⁹

He hopes to shake them from their apathy and complacency of ease.

So, first and foremost, these spiritual babies are described as being “dull of hearing.”

✠ Second, they are those who, “by this time,” should be “teachers,” but have to be taught AGAIN “the basic principles” of God's Word. Selah.

⁸ Cockerill, Gareth Lee, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 255–56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 255–56.

‡ Third, they are those who love milk and not meat.

Spiritual babies are those who, after being saved for years, are still wrestling with the most basic tenants of the faith.¹⁰

And so, in the very next chapter, the writer will urge them to “leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on [present *passive* subjunctive of φέρω, *to be carried*] to maturity ...” (**Hebrews 6:1a**).

‡ And fourth, they are those who, because they’ve never grown up in the Word, remain “unskilled in the word of righteousness.”

They lack virtually every spiritual skill because they’ve never exercised them.

They not only *don’t* ‘die daily,’ they have no idea what it means to die *at all*.

Although God has given them a new life in Christ, they rarely ‘take it out for a drive.’

They enjoy the security of believing they’re saved, but truth be told, they still ‘love’ their life in Adam along withal of its accoutrements.

And then he says this:

“Solid food is for the mature [τέλειος], for *those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*”

So, now he describes mature Christians:

‡ The mature are those who are nourished on the solid food of the Word.

They search for the deep things of God through the leading of the Spirit of God.

¹⁰ Like those who have been saved 10 years and are still wondering if abortion is a sin! By the way, the word of God called John the Baptist a βρέφος, *a living child yet unborn*, in **Luke 1:41-42**, while he was still dancing in Elizebeth’s womb! “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby [βρέφος, *a living child yet unborn*] leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 2:10**, that “these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

- ✚ The mature are those who have been “trained” by the “constant practice” of being ‘filled’ with the Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**), ‘walking’ in the Spirit (**Romans 8:4, Galatians 5:16**), and ‘keeping in step’ with the Spirit (**Galatians 5:25**).
- ✚ The mature are those who have developed strong spiritual “discernment” skills and can readily “distinguish good from evil.”

The Mature and the Spiritual

- 1) So, back to **1 Corinthians 3:1-2**, Paul says: “I ... could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. [So,] I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready.”

He’s saying:

‘I fed you with milk, because what else could I do? You had to eat something, right? As spiritual babies, you only desired milk – devotionals! I wanted to give you solid meat, doctrine, the deep things of God, but you had no appetite for those things and no capacity to metabolized them. And your immaturity is evident in your behavior – your selfishness, your striving, your jealousy and your sectarianism. Because of your lack of maturity, I could not impart any wisdom to you!’

Ah, but there are *some* to whom the Apostles *do* impart wisdom!

1 Corinthians 2:6-7: “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age ... We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.”

1 Corinthians 2:13: “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”¹¹

And again, who are these mature believers? Who are these ‘spiritual’ ones?

They are those who “have their powers of discernment trained *by constant practice* to distinguish good from evil” (**Hebrews 5:11-14**).

How do we live a life that’s pleasing to the Lord? How do you “distinguish good from evil”?

In a word, *practice*. In two words, *constant practice*.

2) Then Paul tells us something truly astonishing.

He talks about things that “no eye has seen, nor ear [has] heard, nor the heart of man [has] imagined,” things pertaining to “what God has prepared for those who love him” (**1 Corinthians 2:9**).

And then he makes this mic-drop statement: “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (**1 Corinthians 2:10**).

How, *through the Spirit*.” We can understand even the deep things that God wills to reveal to us. Why? Because we have the Holy Spirit.

And so, Church, with this wonderful encouragement, let’s take up the challenge to “leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity ...” (**Hebrews 6:1a**).

Amen?

¹¹ In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prayed “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, [might give the believers at Ephesus] the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” He prayed for the Colossians that they “may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9).