

The Age of Immaturity

Intro:

1. Ph 2:15 – “*Without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.*” Ours is a crooked and perverse generation in part because of a lack of maturity.
2. Materialism – Impulsiveness, greediness. Immorality – Middle age men driven by hormones, mid-life crisis. Relativism – Inability to distinguish right from wrong.
3. We need look no further than our last president to find adolescent national leader. “*Woe unto you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning*” (Ecc 10:16); God threatens the removal of competent leaders (Is 3:1-7). From the top down, our nation is one of immaturity.

1. Spiritual Stagnation

A. The goal of spiritual maturity:

1. Col 1:28 – “*Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”
2. Eph 4:12-15 – “*to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ ... no longer children ... may grow up in all things ...*”.
3. “Perfect” (*teleios*) is not “flawless” but full grown, mature according to our potential.

B. Why do some stay spiritual babies?

1. Some have never fully committed themselves to Christ. The Corinthians were “still carnal” and “behaving like mere men” (1 Cor 3:1-4). Such people always measure obedience against competing desires and interests.
2. Some base their decisions on emotion/circumstance instead of bedrock truths of God’s word (“*tossed to and fro ...*” – Eph 4:14).
3. Some are self-deceived. Their service may outwardly conform but motivated by habit, guilt, social interests, family harmony or other illegitimate motives.

C. If we fail to spiritually grow we will go backward – Heb 5:12-14. Our environment is corrosive, physically and spiritually. Unused things deteriorate, including minds.

2. Things That Promote Spiritual Growth

- A. Appetite: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled”* (Mt 5:6); *“desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby”* (1 Pet 2:2). This desire must come from within; it cannot be artificially created.
- B. Study: Desire alone will not cause growth; we must partake of that which causes growth. This means *studying the Bible!* 2 Tim 2:15; Ac 17:11. Hindrances:
1. Many things compete for study time. If you spend one hour per week studying your Bible you probably spend more time fixing your hair, walking the dog, writing letters, vacuuming the house, paying bills, carpooling, watching sports on TV, playing computer/video games and a hundred other mundane activities.
 2. We are not a reading society; we are visual (pictures) and auditory (music). For reasons of His own, God has tied faith to *reading*. This involves technical study as well as reflection, devotional reading. It involves private meditation and public discussion. It involves delving into the details, *“leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection ...”* (Heb 6:1).
 3. Learning to apply this knowledge to real-life situations is called wisdom, and this is acquired through prayer (Jas 1:5). But prayer is often neglected as well.
- C. Trials/testing: We will never progress unless we are tested – *“let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (Jas 1:2-4). This understanding puts a different spin on hardship: *“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor 12:10).
- D. The cooperative work of spiritually mature Christians: elders, evangelists, teachers – Eph 4:11ff. We are not Christians “at large”; we are to belong to a community where there is discipline, accountability, oversight, pooling of resources. We need the experience, knowledge, wisdom, guidance and stimulation of other Christians in order to grow. Yet many see the local church as an “intrusion.”
- E. Clearly defined goals. Ultimately, the goal is Christ being formed in us (Gal 4:19). If this “greater” goal is present, then the “lesser” goals of being elders, deacons, teachers, or evangelists will be realized. *Do you have **any** spiritual goals?*

Conclusion: Where do elders come from? They don’t just happen; they are grown within congregations that are diligent and serious about helping everyone reach their spiritual potential. What about 58th St.? What is your role here? How are you contributing to the overall fabric of the congregation? *If everyone was like you, what kind of church would this be?*