

For the past several months, I have been discussing the troubles Timothy was facing when Paul wrote to him in **1 and 2 Timothy**. If you recall, in my first letter on this topic back in October, I encouraged all of us to “settle ourselves under our spiritual fathers—those who can lead us into the spiritual truths of God’s Word.” This is because, in our time, we are inundated with distractions and so many voices that pull us off course and weigh us down, leaving little room for God to assist us directly. We must begin to move to change these influences if we are to grow spiritually.

One very critical way to begin the process of spiritual growth in our lives is to reconnect with the Holy Spirit through prayer. **Jude vs.20**, encourages us to build ourselves up in our most holy faith through prayer. In the spiritual realm, a person may be saved for fifty years and still be a baby, or may grow out of that phase very quickly, depending on the nourishment they receive and the time devoted to spiritual development.

This is exactly what Paul was referring to in **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.”

Likewise, the Apostle Peter exhorts us in **1 Peter 2:2** to, “like newborn infants (those newly born from the womb), desire the **pure spiritual milk of the Word**.”

Spiritual growth requires spiritual milk, and the source of that milk is the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. This is why our leaders must be spiritual. Otherwise, we are left trying to find nourishment on our own, without proper guidance during the infant stages of development. God desires for us to be situated under proper leadership, yet we are not always inclined to receive the nourishment that is best for us.

To help us better connect with what I am saying, I will use the next couple of newsletters to show how the Greek language describes the different stages of growth in our walk with God. There are six Greek words used by New Testament writers to describe stages of growth. In **1 Peter**, referenced above, we see one of those words, and it is the first one I would like to discuss. It is also the only place in the New Testament where it appears: **(Strong’s 738) – ἀρτιγέννητος (artigennētos) – Newborn**

Peter provides a special emphasis by using this word, and its context deepens the importance of spiritual growth. The word carries the meaning of a brand-new child, just brought forth from the mother’s womb. This newborn has no lived experience and no history in the natural world. The senses were completely sheltered in the womb, but as soon as the child enters the world, the senses immediately activate.

This is the picture Peter is painting when he says, “like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk.” He does not stop there; he also identifies the source of that milk—the Word. In **verses 4 and 5**, Peter expresses this even more clearly: “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

So what exactly is Peter saying here? By using the word **newborn**, he is showing us that we must offer ourselves as a sacrifice that is now acceptable to God because our High Priest, Jesus Christ, stands with us. **Everything we were in the natural before we were born again must now be suspended, examined, and weighed against the Word of God.** Like newborns, we must be brought to the source of our

nourishment—the Word of God. This is how we grow spiritually: by continually feeding on the pure spiritual milk.

The difficulty is that we have been shaped and conditioned by our first birth. Our senses immediately went into action when we entered the world—touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing all functioning at full strength. Our sin nature was already at work through the flesh, and we began to absorb everything the natural world offered through our senses. Then, at some point, we are saved, born again, and enter into a new relationship with God while carrying the baggage of our former life into our new birth.

It is no wonder Peter used this word. We must embrace an identity in our spirit as brand new—fresh from the womb and ready for spiritual nourishment. With this in mind, you can see why I emphasized the need for spiritual fathers. You can also understand why I said in my November letter, while exhorting leaders:

If you are going to lead others into spiritual living, you must first live spiritually yourself. Why is this so vital? It should be obvious to anyone called by God to lead, as Timothy was—you cannot give what you do not have, and you cannot lead where you are unwilling to go.

The assistance we provide to the Holy Spirit by leaning into Him—and recognizing that we are called to be a spiritual people, a spiritual house—creates the framework He uses to help us grow. ***This makes it clear that maturity is critical; growth is a necessity, and we cannot remain babes.*** As we examine the other stages of growth in upcoming newsletters, you will begin to see how they help identify where we are in this process.

Have a blessed month,

**JANN T. BUTLER**

