

Greetings in the precious name of Jesus. Last month I began sharing on this subject by referencing an often overlooked verse from **1 Peter**, where the Apostle Peter used a word to describe a newly born child—just from the womb. His use of this Greek word is profound because it clearly identifies how we must begin this journey once we are saved: with complete humility, abandoning everything we think we know. This posture allows God Himself, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to deposit His truths directly into the newly formed ground of our spirit.

Consider **Mark 4**, where Jesus speaks about the good ground. Have you considered what ground He was referring to when He described it? The parable of the sower clearly identifies the types of ground where the Word of God cannot take proper root: the **wayside**, the **stony ground**, and the ground sown **among thorns**. All of these reflect the Word being received within **the ground of the flesh**. The **good ground**, however, describes **the new ground we now have within our born-again spirit**.

This is where the verse in **1 Peter** shines so clearly "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (NKJV). In the King James Version, the end of this verse is not translated as clearly as it could be. In the Greek it actually reads **that you may grow unto your salvation (sōtēria)**. This matters greatly in relation to what I am sharing here because it indicates that growth is expected subsequent to being saved. Jesus echoes this same idea in **Mark 4:20** "But these are the ones sown on good ground, those **who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit**: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

To hear the Word and accept it—this is what begins the growth process. The point I want to emphasize is that this growth is spiritual transformation first, which ultimately reveals itself in fruit borne on the branches, which is in the natural.

Let us now move on to the next level of development described in the Bible. Remember, these stages relate directly to our development from infancy to mature adulthood. The writers of the New Testament used these words to describe the development process, and I am emphasizing how closely they correspond to our spiritual development.

The next word we will examine is **Strong's 3516 — νήπιος (nēpios)**, often translated infant or child. This word appears fifteen times in the New Testament.

Children at this stage cannot yet speak; they are unlearned and unenlightened. They can only drink milk and eat soft foods. They must be continually cared for and have nearly everything done for them. At this stage they cannot produce anything yet—they are simply being fed and cared for.

Hebrews 5:12–13 is one of the passages that uses this word "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe (nēpios)." Another example is found in **1 Corinthians 3:1** "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes (nēpios) in Christ."

Verses like these shed light on how this word is used to describe Christians moving through this formative stage. From a spiritual perspective, a person may be saved for fifty years and still remain a nēpios, or they may grow out of this phase very quickly. Much depends on their level of humility, the spiritual nourishment they receive, and the time they devote to the Lord.

There are two basic things to remember about babies. First, one must be careful about what they are fed because everything goes directly to the mouth. Second, they will eat almost anything because they have little to no discernment.

One challenge for church leadership is to identify a person's true spiritual growth. ***It is often buried beneath what they have become in the natural world before they identify as a Christian and begin their journey of spiritual development.*** This is why individuals who possess natural talent can sometimes be placed on a platform within the church far earlier than they should be. This can be extremely dangerous. It is precisely why Paul exhorted in **1 Timothy 3:6** that a bishop or overseer must be "not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil." ***Paul understood that Timothy's first priority had to be spiritual formation***—both in himself and in those he would lead. A novice believer cannot lead someone spiritually to a place where they themselves have not yet arrived.

Should a nēpios be given responsibility or authority? The answer is no—at least not beyond the level of their spiritual growth in Christ. They are not capable of leading others yet, no matter how impressive their natural talents may appear. If they are placed on a platform too quickly, the weight of responsibility can cause them to collapse under pressure.

Spiritual babies are potentially vulnerable to not being established and roam from church to church or from teacher to teacher, searching for something exciting that makes them feel good. We see a similar pattern with children in the natural world. Once they discover sweets and sugar, they may want to consume only those things, not realizing that it can harm them. In the same way, we would never give an infant or very young child responsibilities they are not capable of carrying. For this reason, believers in this infant stage must be cared for, watched over carefully, and continually nourished with the pure milk of the Word of God, as we discussed previously from **1 Peter**.

Mark 4, which we referenced earlier, also shows how the Word of God—when received only through the ground of the flesh or planted merely within the carnal mind—***can be stolen by Satan, produce short-lived commitments, or become choked by competing influences.*** In this formative stage of spiritual development, we must be willing to suspend our natural way of thinking so that God can begin forming a new way of thinking within us.

This is why Jesus said in **Matthew 18:3** "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

It is absolutely critical that we present ourselves in humility to the Lord in the process of spiritual development. While this may be one of the more difficult things to do, it is necessary if we are to avoid remaining in the condition Paul described in **1 Corinthians 3:1**, where he said, "I could not speak to you as spiritual people."

This month, spend time before the Lord in prayer and in the Word, asking Him to help you identify where you currently are in your development. For a believer in the nēpios stage, recognizing this reality is one of the most important steps you can take. This month, let us examine ourselves honestly and see where we truly are.

Have a blessed month as we approach Easter,

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