

# PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter from Lifestream Teaching Ministries

*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 KJV)*

Volume 5, Issue 4

April 2007

## Spiritually Retarded

Art Nelson

The Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary defines “retarded” as *slow or limited in intellectual or emotional development*. We all have probably known someone who fits into this definition. What happens is that a person continues to mature physically until he is full-grown, but his intellectual and emotional development stops prior to maturity. In other words, his physical age may be 21 but his mental age may be 10.

Our society makes allowances for the “slow”, that is, the “mentally handicapped or retarded”. Those in this category are not expected to excel or achieve or to even have what we would consider a normal life. They are cared for by family, friends, or social programs so that they can live in an “acceptable” manner.

I have a nephew that is considered “slow” or mentally retarded. However, when I look at his life I sometimes wonder exactly who has the issues, him or society. He married another person who is considered “slow”. They have a nine year old boy who is normal intellectually, maybe more than normal. They own their house (outright, it is paid for). They both work—him as a manual laborer, and her as a kitchen helper in an industrial kitchen. They have practically no debt. They are completely involved in their son's life and school activities and so very proud of him for doing things that they can't. They go to church and live a happy life. As a matter of fact, they probably have a more stable, happier life than others in his family.

But, when my wife and I visit, we can't relate to them the way we do to others. His mentality is about that of a twelve year old. So, our talk when we visit is on a level that would be of interest to a twelve year old. While he enjoys our visits tremendously, I have to take them in small doses because our discussions are so shallow from our viewpoint that I can't maintain interest very long; but, I can't let them even get a hint of that because I would never do anything that would hurt their feelings.

Now, what is true from the natural mental process is also true of the spiritual development process. The only difference is that we do not have a choice in how our intellectual development occurs. We do have a choice in our spiritual development. From the spiritual viewpoint,

arrested spiritual development is by our choice and usually results from our unwillingness to be obedient to the word of the Lord.

## Diet and Exercise

In the natural, we know that diet effects mental development when we are young and also plays a part in being able to maintain our mental acuity. Spiritual diet also has a tremendous effect on our spiritual development.

We are all aware of the fact that the Word is considered food for us and should be a part of our daily diet. But, Jesus added two other food groups to our menu.

**John 4:34 NASB** Jesus \*said to them, "**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.**"

So, our diet consists of the *Word* of God, the *will* of God and the *work* of God. It takes all three of these to have a healthy spiritual diet that causes us to fully develop spiritually.

This wasn't the case with the Children of Israel:

**Hebrews 4:2 NASB** For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

The Greek word for “united” that is used here is used in secular Greek today as a biological term for the process of chewing our food and mixing it with saliva. Our digestion process actually begins with the saliva in our mouth and it is of primary importance that our food be mixed thoroughly with saliva before it gets to the stomach. Our spiritual saliva is faith and it is absolutely necessary for our spiritual food to be thoroughly mixed with faith so that we can digest it.

Our natural food provides all the necessary nutrients that get converted into muscle, bone, and brain matter. In similar manner, our spiritual food becomes all that we need to mature. The goal is for the Word to be made flesh in us just as Jesus was the Word made flesh. We become what we eat.

Mixing the word with faith involves the will and the work of the Lord. James tells us that faith requires action, otherwise, it is dead. When faith dies, our spiritual maturing process stops. We become *spiritually retarded*.

## Arrested Development

From the early Church forward, arrested development has continually been a problem. Paul addressed this issue with the Corinthians.

**1 Corinthians 3:1-2 NASB** (1) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. (2) I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

Teachers adjust the diet that they are feeding the students based on maturity. Paul says that they are not yet able to receive solid food. They have remained infants longer than expected. They were not maturing as they should and were in danger of becoming spiritually retarded.

Arrested spiritual development is even clearer in the book of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 5:12-14 NASB** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

They should have reached a spiritual maturity level that enabled them to be teachers; however, their spiritual growth had stopped and even regressed. At some point that had moved to solid food but now couldn't handle it and must be fed milk again.

This is important because it is those that are maturing, going on in the Lord, to whom He teaches knowledge, not the babies.

**Isaiah 28:9 NASB** "To whom would He teach knowledge, And to whom would He interpret the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* taken from the breast?"

This is why there is so little true knowledge of the Lord and His purposes in the Church. The Institutional Church is structured in such a way as to maintain people as spiritual infants—they have become a glorified day care center for the spiritually retarded. Teaching and preaching have been “dumbed down” to the point that not even the elementary principles of Christ as listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 are being taught.

## Growing up

It is God's intention that we mature as His sons. Maturing is a process and takes time. It is mature sons that participate in the plans and purposes of the Father. Maturing affects our thinking process and our emotional responses. In other words, a major portion of our growing up is the process of renewing our mind.

The difference between a child and an adult is the *way* they think, how information is processed, and the *way* in which they react emotionally. The renewing the mind process changes the way we think and the way that our emotions respond.

**1 Corinthians 14:20 NASB (20)** Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

Before we know the Lord, we have a *heathen* mind, our thinking process is heathen. When we are born again, we receive a new spirit but we still have our heathen thinking process. We have a *carnal* mind because our inner mental process operates at the direction of the flesh rather than the spirit. The renewing the mind process moves us from a carnal mind toward a renewed *spiritual* mind so that we can come into the *corporate mind* of Christ. This is the essence of growing up.

There is nothing wrong with being a child when you are a child. But, it is wrong for us to remain as children. We are to mature in the Lord.

**1 Corinthians 13:11 NASB (11)** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

A child reasons like a child; his thinking process is like that of a child; he talks like a child. All because he *is* a child. But, Paul says, when we mature we put away childish things; that is, thinking, reasoning, and talking like a child.

The bulk if not all of the Institutional Church is made up of children who are playing “dress-up”, pretending or playacting as adults. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 that while there is jealousy, strife, divisions among us, we are still carnal, fleshly; this is, we are acting like children. One says I follow this teacher, another says I follow that teacher---what do we think our denominations are but the result of this same thinking process?

The Lord has given us all that we need to mature. He sent us the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit and He provided equipping gifts to His people

**Ephesians 4:11-12 NASB** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

The goal is to bring us to maturity. The Holy Spirit works on us individually to renew our minds and He, along with the five fold ministry, work on us corporately toward an expected result.

**Ephesians 4:14 NASB** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

The expected result is that **we are no longer to be children**. The work is to go on until we all grow up, individually and corporately.

**Ephesians 4:13 NASB** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

We cannot become content with an arrested spiritual development. We need to have the attitude that Paul had:

**Philippians 3:12-14 NASB** (12) Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, [*complete, mature*] but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Christ has laid hold of us. He has a purpose for us. He has apportioned work for us. The work cannot be done by children, only by mature sons. We press on so that we can lay hold of that which Christ has apportioned to us.

## Dealing with the Spiritually Retarded

In the natural, when the parents realize that their child is not developing mentally as expected it doesn't mean that they stop loving the child. On the contrary, they will extend extra love and care and will do things for the “slow” child that they would not do for his siblings.

So it is with our Heavenly Father. We may choose not to move forward in the things of God, but the Father still loves us and will still care for us, even to the point of extra care because of our spiritual ignorance.

The problem is in our relationships with them, not the Father's. We can only relate to a spiritually retarded person at the place where their spiritual development was arrested. How many relationships have we destroyed when, in our excitement over understanding a new spiritual truth, we exuberantly share it with someone who doesn't understand it and doesn't appreciate it? Our goal then becomes to convince them of it until the relationship becomes strained or broken. When, in fact, we need to discern where they are spiritually; we may be forcing meat down a baby's throat.

In our walk with the Lord, there will some who will be younger and less mature than we are; there will be some who are our peers, about the same level of maturity; and, there will be some who are more mature than us. This will always be true. However, we relate to each of these groups differently. If everyone is pressing on toward maturity, then there is a broad, rich fellowship with each group. It is only those of arrested development that causes problems in our relationships.

I know that speaking about "the spiritually retarded" sounds arrogant and horrible, because we don't really want to admit that this category exists. It it does exist, we might be in it!

In one sense of the word, we are all spiritually retarded. None of us have arrived at the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ. But, we must press on into the Promised Land. The desert wilderness is no place to set up residence. Let us be no longer children.

© 2003-2007 by Art Nelson and [Lifestream Teaching Ministries](http://www.lifestreamteaching.com)

Previous issues of Present Truth are on the website: [www.lifestreamteaching.com](http://www.lifestreamteaching.com)

For comments or questions contact Art Nelson at this address:

[artnelson@lifestreamteaching.com](mailto:artnelson@lifestreamteaching.com)

You have permission to copy and distribute these materials provided:

1) no changes are made to the content, and, 2) they are not sold.

**Removal instructions:**

This is a free newsletter, without cost or obligation. If you have received this newsletter in error or if you desire not to receive "Present Truth" teaching newsletter please reply with "remove" in the subject area.