**Maturing in Christ**

Harmony from Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14 NKJV

*"Now the seed that fell among thorns are they who hear the word, and when they have heard, go out, and the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the desires for other things, and the pleasures of life, enter in and choke the word, and they become unfruitful and bring no fruit to maturity."*

As we saw in our last lesson, we are to desire the word of God as a baby desires milk: *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby* (1 Peter 2:2). But more than just desiring milk, we must also GROW. When speaking of thorny ground people, Jesus says that after the word of God is strangled out by thorns, "They become unfruitful and bring no fruit to maturity."

Being spiritually fruitful and bringing spiritual fruit to maturity is an important aspect of our Christian life. We are supposed to *"Let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see [our] good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). Paul says, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10). We were created to bring God glory through our good works. Therefore, we must get to a point in our Christian walk when we no longer are babes in Christ but are mature and grown people in the Lord, producing good fruit for all to see.

While these are not the only things that will cause us to mature in Christ, these three are absolutely needed to mature spiritually:

**PRACTICE** - The writer of Hebrews tells us, *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the sayings of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are mature, that is, those who by reason of practice have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits* (Hebrews 5:12-6:3).

Notice he says that if we continue only drinking milk, we are still considered a baby. Therefore, we must want more! We must desire the "solid food" of Christ, so that we can mature and be able to distinguish between good and evil. But it takes practice on our part to work through the elementary parts of our faith and move on to the deeper and more rigorous parts which require more work.

**A SPIRITUAL MINDSET** - Paul tells us, *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. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men*? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

A carnal mind is a worldly mind, and a worldly mind is a mind set on still thinking like a child. We must rise past this stage in our spiritual growth. Envy, strife, divisions, gossip, animosity, hatred, talking bad about someone, and an unforgiving heart are all things that have their roots in carnal thinking. That mind must mature into a mind that thinks like Christ. See Philippians 2:5-8. We must see beyond the physical world and realize that what we do has implications on our eternal life.

**UNITY IN THE BODY** - Again, Paul tells us, *but, speaking the truth in love...grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love* (Ephesians 4:15,16).

Notice that our unity not only allows the individual part to grow, but the entire body also grows. It takes the whole body working together for it to work optimally. This aspect of our spiritual maturity is so important because Jesus prays for it moments before He is arrested and set to die (John 17:20-23). Think of the unity for the church as His dying wish. But notice also that when the body of Christ, is united, it edifies and encourages itself. That means its strength comes from within itself where there should not be any worldly influences which may cause it to stop growing.

The word of God gets strangled when thorns mature quicker and become stronger that the plant itself. Whether they are enticed by worldly temptations or they simply become complacent, thorny ground people stop maturing and slowly stop producing fruit. We cannot let this happen! Jesus Christ provides everything we need to not be thorny ground and be that good ground which produces good fruit. Therefore, mature in the Lord, and produce some thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold!