

Sacred Scriptures

*"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God,
which liveth and abideth forever"*

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CHRISTIAN MATURITY

by Chick Smith

Physical aging began in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though God said, "...for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Physical aging is now natural, according to God's laws for man. Newborns know little, but God has given them a natural desire for milk so that they may grow and mature. Normally this growth continues for fourteen to twenty years, but should there be a lack of food, appetite, or a physical ailment, the child may be deformed, or a midget, or die physically. The newborn in Christ are similar. As Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

The food for all Christians, babes or mature, is the Word of God. One significant difference between physical growth and spiritual growth is the fact that physical growth only lasts about 17 years, but spiritual growth must never cease or we die. One who ceases to be better ceases to be good. The scripture says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God: and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Heb. 5:12). Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 3:2-3, "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 ye are yet carnal..."

In spiritual growth we have some who fail to grow and reach maturity. The most frequent cause of these dying midgets is a lack of appetite for spiritual food and drink, the Word of God. When one doesn't eat physical food because he has no appetite, parents or

friends are alarmed and contact the doctor immediately. When a brother has no appetite for God's word we should be even more alarmed and remember what the great physician has said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). The Word of God, the Bible, is both food and drink to any person who wants to be a mature child of God and spend eternity with Him and Jesus, His Son. Please remember that you cannot grow to maturity, either physically or spiritually, without food and drink often.

There are two teachings in the Bible that might appear to be opposites until we spend a little time with them. One is a teaching of Jesus, telling us in what way we must be like a little child; and one is a teaching by Paul in which we must not be like children. In Mt. 18:1-6, Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst of the disciples, and said, (verse 4) "Therefore whosoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Little children are very humble, eager to learn, and quick to forgive; in these ways we should be like children. But then Paul wrote, "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Eph. 4:14). As children are eager to learn, it is also true that they are very trusting and believing of what older people tell them, and are easily led astray. Paul also warns us of failing to be mature by being childish in other ways. 1 Cor. 14:20 says, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be

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babes, but in understanding be mature."

One reason many fail to become mature saints is because they have other things in their lives that are more important to them than learning God's Word. Often we hear someone say something like "Oh, I wish I could remember the Bible like she (he) does." One lady said to an older man, "Oh, I would give my life to know the Bible like you do." He replied, "Well, yes, that is what it took for me." 1 Cor. 15:34 says, "Awake to righteousness and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."

How can we become a mature worker for our Lord when we do not have the most basic tool--knowledge? An old testament judgment that could also fit us is recorded in Hosea 4:6. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from

being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." We are an example for our children. They nearly always follow us in our love of God's Word, (or in the lack thereof) and follow us to our eternal destination.

God is for us in our efforts to mature. Remember, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Read Romans 8:28-34. We must be aware of the influence of Satan in his attempts to stunt or stop our growth, and you can be sure when we fail to grow he is in there somewhere. He is the one who discourages you and tells you "there is no use." Reach up and put your hand in the hand of God that is reaching down for you, (Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind) and you will reach christian maturity.

Evangelist of the Church

SAMUEL THE DREAMER

by Charles Fry

It's easy enough to be a pessimist, to perceive problems and trends that are discouraging. It's easy, too, to be a dreamer, to seek escape in unrealistic fantasies. It is far more challenging (and useful) to be a visionary, a constructive dreamer who sees problems and needs, and looks for ways to meet the needs and solve the problems. Samuel the seer must have been a visionary.

Samuel was a prophet of God and judge of Israel who bridged the time between Eli the judge-priest and Saul the king (1 Samuel 1-10). He was the first of "the prophets" (Acts 3:24). When Samuel was a young man, at the end of Eli's life, the house of God at Shiloh had been destroyed (see Jeremiah 7:12, 1 Samuel 1:3, 3:3, 15, 4:10-22, 6:21-7:1), and subsequently the Ark of the Covenant was not associated with the tabernacle again until the days of David's reign, a span probably exceeding eighty years, and not truly united with the altar of sacrifice until Solomon built the temple. During Samuel's time of leadership he erected an altar at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17) and presided over sacrifices at various places (1 Sam. 9:11-12, 10:8, 7:5 7 9, 16:1-2), while the

Ark was kept at Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam. 7:2, 2 Sam. 6:3) in the home of Abinadab. The other parts of the tabernacle may have moved about somewhat, perhaps to Nob (1 Sam. 21), but finally came to rest at Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39-40, 2 Chr. 1:3-6) during the latter days of David and early days of Solomon.

Thus during Samuel's tenure as judge and prophet, the rituals required by the Law of Moses could not have been carried out properly, with the Ark and the altar separated as they were, including major requirements such as the day of atonement (see Leviticus 16). There is no indication that Samuel ever associated himself either with the Ark or the tabernacle after the fall of Shiloh to the Philistines, nor that he attempted in any way to revive or restore tabernacle worship to the significance it had held in the early days of Israel.

Perhaps Samuel perceived too many other needs and problems to be dealt with first, so that a better tabernacle/temple worship could be instituted at the appropriate time. Despite Samuel's lack of

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involvement with the tabernacle in his life, there is evidence that he dreamed of a better day for Israel when she would worship God in a way that once again utilized the full resources of priests and Levites and the offerings of the people. A contributing factor to the delay may have been that during Samuel's lifetime the leading priests had been the family of Eli, corrupt and under a curse from God (1 Samuel 2:27-36, 3:11-14), and the senior priests and their families were slain on two different occasions (1 Sam. 4:11ff, 22:6ff). Furthermore, King Saul, in his alienation from God, became actively hostile against the priests, and when he murdered their families, the survivors fled to live as fugitives with David (1 Sam. 22:20).

More than 600 years after the time of Samuel, when the records in the Chronicles were brought together, Ezra and Nehemiah were leading the people in a return to temple worship as it had first been instituted. What is remarkable is that it is not Solomon, the builder of the first temple, who is credited with the early organization of that temple, but David and Samuel (1 Chron. 9:22). None of the organization and assignments directed by David and Samuel could have been implemented during the lifetime of Samuel, who died while David was still a fugitive living in exile (1 Sam. 25:1).

Long before the first concrete steps toward building a temple had been taken, then, the plans must have been made by David and Samuel in the days they spent together (1 Sam. 19:18). David and Samuel must have mused together over Saul's rebellion and the wretched state of both civil and religious affairs in Israel, and "day dreamed" of how things ought to be, and some day could be, when David became king and was able to initiate reforms. Samuel did not live to see any of his plans or instructions about the temple come to pass, and David only laid the groundwork; yet, both had an active role in the planning of assignments and how the Levites would function at the temple more than forty years before it was even built.

Besides his contributions to the organization of restored Levitical service, Samuel also planned ahead in a material way for the eventual building of the temple (1 Chr. 26:26-28). In this, Samuel

established a pattern that was followed by subsequent war leaders of setting aside spoils of war as dedicated to the LORD, even though during his days of leadership there was no regular tabernacle service to maintain, and no known plans to build a house of God. The goods dedicated by Samuel, Saul, Abner, Joab, and David were laid up and finally used as contributions for the building of the temple when its construction began. Of the listed war leaders who dedicated and stored treasure for the LORD, Samuel is the first chronologically, he established the precedent.

Being a constructive dreamer, as Samuel and David evidently were, requires several things:

- 1) Seeing that present things aren't ideal (Eph. 5:15-16). But Samuel and David were not complainers--they were doers.
- 2) Imagining how things could be better, how they ought to be (Eph. 5:27). But David and Samuel were not idealists, they were practical, tackling problems as they could handle them.
- 3) Working on immediate problems and needs, but patiently pursuing long range goals (Eph. 6:13). David and Samuel did not lose sight of the important in doing the urgent.
- 4) Consciously developing successive generations of leaders and willingly turning over responsibility and opportunity to them (Eph. 6:21-22, 2 Tim. 2:1-2). David and Samuel both prepared, but it was Solomon who had to implement most of their plans and use the resources they had provided.
- 5) Always believing in the plan and power of God to accomplish what needs to be accomplished (Eph. 2:10). Samuel and David had dark times during Saul's days, and even during David's reign, but held on to God's promises with conviction.

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Evangelist of the Church

A PREACHING PEOPLE

by John Morris

Author's note: In the following article, the use of certain terms—"circuit rider", "church" (as used in its popular sense), "unchurched", "Christendom"—was made not out of preference, but out of necessity. The words are not those of this author, but of the author of the work quoted. Additionally, the naming of Nashville Bible School is not intended as an endorsement of that institution, but simply as a means of identifying him to which it is applied.

Just prior to the advent of the twentieth century, John E. Dunn, former student of Nashville Bible School, recalled in a missive to his past professor, James A. Harding, some of Harding's own words spoken years before:

...preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine [2 Tim. 4:2]; preach it in a school house, in a tent, in the woods, under a tobacco barn, in a courthouse, in a meetinghouse, publicly and privately, anywhere and everywhere, to one or many, to the rich, to the poor, and to all alike, regardless of poverty or wealth, sex or color, preach the gospel to every soul you meet, and trust God with unwavering faith to uphold and support you. (Brumback, 1957, p. 392)

Dunn recalled this admonition with great fondness. I recall that, as I read it, it stirred my heart. It did so by way of remembrance. It reminded me that the old adage, "The important is seldom urgent, and the urgent seldom important", is simply not true of the gospel. It reminded me that any opportunity to preach Jesus, no matter how unpromising, must be rapidly seized for the sinner's sake. It reminded me that Christians are supposed to be industrious persons, particularly with respect to the gospel. And, it reminded me of our severe shortcomings with regard to these things.

It seems that, though we have intellectualized, we have failed to internalize the knowledge that those who courageously declare the message of the cross have the capacity to "[turn] the world upside

down" (Ax. 17:6). Instead of boldly declaring Christ, we have sat idly by and watched our co-workers, our communities, and our country happily trundle down "the way that leads to destruction" (Mt. 7:13). We have watched our numbers plummet, false doctrines proliferate, and sin prevail, while making no equable earnest effort to pull the pendulum back. Worse, we have justified our inaction with supposed truths, namely, that things are so different now from what they were in the days when the church flourished, that church growth is a near impossibility, that since apathy and ignorance have increased, we cannot help but decrease. I wonder.

In Bible in Pocket, Gun in Hand, Ross Phares (1964) relates the story of a circuit rider named Garretson, who in 1779 encountered a man during his travels in the Delaware woods. After asking the man, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Garretson was amazed to hear the man respond, "I do not know him; he must not live in these parts." A similar experience was had by another circuit rider about that same time: "Who killed Abel?" he asked a boy he was quizzing to ascertain his level of scriptural knowledge. The boy replied innocently, but ignorantly, "I didn't know he was dead. We just moved here last week" (Phares, 1964, p. 1). "Such was the religious ignorance on the American frontier following the colonies' break with England" (Phares, 1964, p. 2).

Such ignorance and spiritual apathy were not confined to the frontier, however. In 1760 only one New Englander out of eight was a church member. The ratio in the Middle colonies was one to fifteen, and in the South about one in twenty. The church historian William Warren Sweet said of the early days of this country that "there came to be more unchurched people in America, in proportion to population, than any country in Christendom." In 1800 only an estimated 7 percent of the population were church members. (Phares, 1964, p. 2)

Evil abounded in this nation two hundred years ago just as it does now, but not so much that God could

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