

Hebrews

Hebrews 5:11-6:3 – Growing In Godliness

February 8, 2009

I. Introduction

- A. **Hebrews 5:11- 6:3 . . .** Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [5:12] 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. [5:13] For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. [5:14] But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. [6:1] Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [6:2] of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. [6:3] And this we will do, if God permits.

- B. Last week I began in much the same way as I am beginning this week, because, just like **Hebrews 5:1-10**, there is a lot of exciting and interesting material in this portion of Hebrews – and we could spend the rest of our teaching time considering what it means or how it fits into our theological constructs. However, my goal today, as it was last week, is to talk about living the Christian life – and leave any talk about the difficult to understand phrases and challenging theological statements to others, or to another time.

- C. Prayer

II. Growing Up In The Faith

- A. When it comes to the Christian life, we either grow to adulthood in a reasonable and measured amount of time or we, in essence, remain infants. We either mature or we stagnate in immaturity. We either move forward or we fall backward.
 - 1. When it comes to the Christian life, it is God's will – and therefore His expectation – that we grow up to spiritual maturity in a reasonable and measured amount of time just like it is every parent's expectation that the children will grow up to mature adulthood in a reasonable and measured amount of time.

2. Now you might be thinking that God's expectation that we grow up to spiritual maturity in this way is a bit unrealistic given all our limitations in life – BUT IT ISN'T.
 - a. When we look at all life – be it plant, animal, or human life – we clearly see that it is God's plan that we grow from infancy to adulthood, from small and needing care to big and being able to serve, from uneducated to educated, from young and foolish to old and wise, from immature to mature, and from spiritual babes to being Christ-like.
 - b. And so you see, God's expectation that we grow up spiritually in a reasonable and measured amount of time is as realistic as our expectation that our plants, animals, siblings, and children will grow to maturity in a reasonable and measured amount of time.
 - c. To do anything other than to travel this path of reasonable and measured progression from infancy to adulthood is to resist what is natural. And for the Christian, dragging our feet in the pursuit of spiritual maturity is to reject God's will and to ignore God's Word – be it His speaking voice, the leading of the Holy Spirit, or the written Word.
 3. And yet, in spite of this expectation on God's part, many in the church today – though they ought to be spiritual adults by now – are stuck in spiritual infancy. It is my belief that the body of Christ, in general, is woefully immature – and I don't see anything happening in the church today that raises my hopes that the maturity level is going to rise significantly any time soon.
- B. Well, what does all this have to do with us? I believe the message we need to hear today from **Hebrews 5:11-6:3** is that we, as individuals and as a group of believers are growing up too slow. If our children were taking as long to get through grade school, middle school, high school and college as we are taking to get to a basic adult level of spiritual maturity, we would be aghast – and we would be searching for every possible remedy available to get our children back on the track of reasonable and measured growth so they would achieve adult maturity in what we deem a natural amount of time.
1. How is it that we are so content to extend the natural time required to grow up into spiritual adulthood? Yes, I know that we are busy. I know that we have many demands on our time. But growing up to Christ-likeness should no more be an option for us

than we are willing to let growing up to adulthood be an option for our children.

- a. And yet many of us are dragging our feet in one or more areas where we ought to be teachers by now. But because we are dragging our feet, we are still babes, still immature, still clinging to our selfish and sinful ways instead of going on to Christ-likeness in those areas.
 - b. And so I ask you again, how is it that we are so content to extend the natural time required to grow up into spiritual adulthood?
2. How is it that we are content with partial holiness when we serve and love and worship a Holy God?
 - a. Our problem isn't that we don't like to hear profound and challenging teaching or good preachers. It isn't that we don't enjoy learning new, deeper truths about God, His Word, and the Christian way. It isn't that we haven't made observable and even commendable progress in some areas of the Christian life.
 - b. Our problem is that we don't want to wholly apply the truth we are taught. We want to be Christian, but not wholly Christian. We want to put off the old, sinful nature, but not completely. We want to pursue godliness, but not all the time. We want to be like Christ, but not in everything. We want to love God supremely and our neighbor as our self, as long as we can still be self-centered – at least in some things. So we drag our feet and extend the natural time it should take for us to go from spiritual infancy to Christian adulthood, from immaturity to spiritual maturity.
 3. Now I want to make this next point perfectly clear. As I see things, few of us settle into Christian mediocrity or slow spiritual growth by thoughtful, deliberate choices, but rather by a multitude of careless choices – and by unchallenged or undealt with desires that compel us to hold on to at least a little bit of our flesh and a little bit of the world.
 4. And so I say to us again – if our children were taking as long to grow up in relation to the natural progression of education as we are in relation to the Christ-like life, we would be aghast. And if we

would be aghast at our children taking too long, we should not be surprised that God is saying to us today: “By now you should be teachers – that is, you should be at the place of spiritual maturity where you are able to teach others how to live a mature Christian life.

- C. Returning to our text, let me read again these words from **Hebrews 5:11-13** . . . Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [5:12] 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. [5:13] For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.
 1. There are three assumed truths in these words.
 - a. The first assumed truth is: **There is a direct correlation between your spiritual condition and your understanding of God and His word.** Let me say it another way: **The more you practice the truth you know the more truth you understand.**
 - b. The second assumed truth is: **If your spiritual growth is stagnating, you have become dull of hearing.** Or to say it another way: **If you are not growing it is because you are not acting on what you are hearing.**
 - c. The third assumed truth is: **Spiritual growth from infancy to adulthood should take place in a reasonable and measured amount of time.** We will go on learning after reaching spiritual adulthood, there is no denying that, but we will go on learning as adults not children.
 2. There are specific and easily recognized signs of infancy or childishness.
 - a. Children are highly self-focused.
 - (1) Their focus is on themselves and what they are doing at the moment – which makes them oblivious to the needs of others or the responsibilities of the home.
 - (2) They love to be the center of attention . . . “**Look at me.**”
 - b. Children’s happiness is highly dependent on having personal needs and wants satisfied to their liking. Children are happiest when they are getting their own way or receiving the gifts and attention they want. Tell a child “no” or ask him to do

- what he doesn't want to do and you quickly see where his happiness lies.
- c. Children have a minimal amount of self-discipline. Their thoughts, words, and behavior are highly influenced by felt-needs, personal desires, the influence of others, pressing fears, and the next thing that grabs their attention. When they do exercise self-discipline it is often exercised under compulsion, threat of punishment, or the promise of some treasured reward.
 - d. Children tend toward looking at what they don't have and feeling sorry for themselves rather than looking at what they do have and being thankful. Because of this, children's wants are easily driven by what others have.
 - e. Children can't/don't concentrate very long on any one thing. They flit from one thing to another – from activity to activity, toy to toy, topic to topic, person to person, group to group, and church to church – always looking for something new or different to excite, entertain, or satisfy them.
 - f. Children are easily amused and occupied by simple things. When put in a situation where complex thinking or activities are required, they complain and do their best to get away. They prefer to be told what to do or say rather than being asked to think it out themselves.
 - g. Children don't like working through the processes required for learning the things necessary for growing up. It isn't that they don't want to be involved in grown up activities (*let me do that*), it's that they don't want to learn how to do them right. And as for learning from their mistakes, they don't want to examine their motives, or think about their bad choices and how they could have made better choices, or give serious thought to how their behavior impacted someone else.
 - h. Children want to go to church as long as it is fun (*entertaining, exciting, self-gratifying*). If it is boring, by their estimation, they want no part of it.
- D. Returning to our text once again, we read in **Hebrews 5:14-6:1** . . . But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. [vs. 6:1] Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity.

1. I want to draw your attention to three words in these two verses. They are (1) practice, (2) leaving, and (3) press on. Why these three words? Because these three words describe three significant manifestations of spiritual maturity.

- a. **Practice:** This word practice has two meanings and both are important to spiritual maturity.
 - (1) The first meaning describes a settled way of life or a habit.
 - (2) The second meaning describes what we do in preparation for the real thing. No one becomes mature in a sport or a trade or a career or the Christian life without practice. And practice requires discipline (*mind, body, food, etc.*), time, energy, hard choices, and perseverance.
- b. **Leaving and Press on:** Here, again, there are two ideas expressed by these three words that are important to spiritual maturity.
 - (1) First, leaving and pressing on – is, in essence, moving away from or putting away that which mires us in spiritual immaturity and dulls our sense of urgency to grow up. We see this same truth stated as putting off the old nature and old habits and old thoughts and old behaviors and putting on the habits, thoughts, and behaviors of Jesus Christ.
 - (2) Second, leaving and pressing on speaks of a determined, purposeful, and focused use of energy.
 - (a) You cannot easily leave behind what you treasure or what clings to you as does a bad habit or what has enslaved you as does alcohol, drugs, or other addictive temptations. And so leaving behind requires effort and perseverance on our part.
 - (b) And you cannot press on without the perpetual use of energy and focused attention to where you are heading.
- c. And so I put before you the fact that leaving what is ungodly behind and pressing on to become what Christ saved us to be are significant marks of spiritual maturity.

E. What about you?

1. Do you have childish ways that by now should have been replaced with more mature, adult ways?

2. Are you still dealing with habits, thoughts, and behaviors that by now should have been put to death and replaced with godly habits, thoughts, and behaviors?
3. Is your security in God? Is God your first and foremost source love, joy, peace, and contentment? Do you weep over your sin? Are you purposefully and daily pursuing specific growth in godliness so that you can look back six months and see that you have become more Christ-like in measurable and observable ways? Are you growing to spiritual maturity in the natural time allotted for such growth?

III. Conclusion:

- A. **Ephesians 4:11-16** . . . 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; [13] 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. [14] 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; [15] but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.