

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Jesus is Better

Sermon # 10

“You Need To Grow Up!!!”

Hebrews 5:11–6:2

? Tim Hansel tells the story in his book “Holy Sweat” that a close friend of his was asked back to his forty-year high school reunion. *“For months he saved to take his wife back to the place and the people he’d left four decades before. The closer the time came for the reunion, the more excited he became, thinking of all the wonderful stories he would hear about the changes and the accomplishments these old friends would tell him... He wondered if any others had encountered this Christ who had changed him so profoundly. He even tried to guess what some of his friends would look like, and what kind of jobs and families some of these special friends had.*

The day came to leave and I drove them to the airport. Their energy was almost contagious. “I’ll pick you up on Sunday evening, and you can tell me all about it,” I said. “Have a great time.”

Sunday evening arrived. As I watched them get off the plane, my friend seemed almost despondent. I almost didn’t want to ask, but finally I said, “Well, how was the reunion?” “Tim,” the man said, “it was one of the saddest experiences of my life.” “Good grief,” I said, more than a little surprised. “What happened?” “It wasn’t what happened but what didn’t happen. It has been forty years, forty years—and they haven’t changed. They had simply gained weight, changed clothes, gotten jobs...but they hadn’t really changed. And

what I experienced was maybe one of the most tragic things I could ever imagine about life. For reasons I can't fully understand, it seems as though some people choose not to change."

There was a long silence as we walked back to the car. On the drive home, he turned to me and said, "I never, never want that to be said of me, Tim. Life is too precious, too sacred, too important. If you ever see me go stagnant like that, I hope you give me a quick, swift kick where I need it—... I hope you'll love me enough to challenge me to keep growing." [Tim Hansel. Holy Sweat. (Chicago: Word Books, 1987) pp. 54-55]

So if you need a swift kick in the pants this one is for you. Hebrews 5:11 reads, *"of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) 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. (13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (6:1) Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."*

The author having begun a discussion of Christ as our "great" High Priest in the fourteenth verse of Chapter four, suddenly breaks

off the topic to confront his listeners with the problem of their spiritual immaturity.

Growth is so important to us that arrested development is universally regarded as a tragedy, whether it is physical or mental or emotional. Yet arrested spiritual development is a tragedy that few are aware of and even fewer concerned enough to take action about. In the passage that we will consider today we are going to look at the three Marks of Spiritual Immaturity.

The first mark of spiritual immaturity is Dullness Toward the Word of God. (v. 11) *"of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) 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."*

The opening statement of verse eleven says in effect, "I have much too say about this!" This refers to the author's statement in verse ten concerning the priesthood of Melchizedek. And indeed he does have a great deal to say about the priesthood of Melchizedek which we will examine when the author returns to this subject in Chapter seven.

In last portion of verse eleven he begins to address there spiritual problem. The word translated "*dull*" in verse eleven is used only here and in 6:12 in the entire New Testament. The word (*nothros*) is derived from two words "no" and "push." A dull speaker for example would be said to have "no push." Or we in the south would say, *"Their get up and go as got up and went."* But seldom is

this word used to describe the listeners. Seldom do we accuse an audience of being dull listeners but that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is doing.

A literally translation even has a touch of humor in it, "*You have become dull in the ears!*" The meaning is that you have become sluggish or apathetic in your listening. In fact the language (perfect tense) suggests a settled state of dullness. It is not that they were dumb but rather that they were numb.

So how does one become "dull of hearing"?

First, We become dull of hearing when we neglect of the hearing of the word of God. Why does the Lord have to include the instruction found in (Heb 10:25) to not forsake the assembly. Because when the hearing of the word of God gets too uncomfortable some deal with it by not coming to where the Word is preached. Dallas Willard in his book "The Divine Conspiracy" commented on the greatest danger facing Christian who have a attitude of consumer Christianity. He wrote, *today's "Christians are treated as consumer/ customers when they come to church. They thought they could pick and choose. They thought they were always right. They thought once they make the cut, they will be saved and are safe. They thought if they don't like what they see, it is OK to take a break and come back later. They thought it is OK to take the word of God lightly and to treat the grace of God cheaply."* [Dallas Willard. The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God. (New York: HarperCollins, 1998)]

Secondly, We become dull of hearing when we take the word of God for granted.

Where I grew up, our home was directly in the flight path of the Little Rock Air Force Base, probably less than 10 miles as the crow flies. Back then it was a Strategic Air Command Base and jets flew out almost constantly. People who come and visit and they would say, *"How do you stand the noise?"* Our reply was, *"We don't even notice it any more."* We had become so accustomed to the planes that we hardly notice them any more! It is easy for people to hear the gospel, and then hear it, and hear it, and hear until it becomes so commonplace that it is meaningless to them.

Has that happened to you, with the preaching and teaching of the word of God.

The great Puritan writer Richard Baxter offers these words of advice, *"Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it... Cast not all upon the minister, as those that will go no further than they are carried by force... You have work to do as well as the preacher, and should all the time be busy as he... you must open your mouths and digest it, for another cannot digest for you... therefore all the while be at work, and abhor the idle heart in hearing, as well as an idle minister."* [As quoted by J.I. Packer. *A Quest for Godliness*. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990). p. 257]

As we hear the Word of God preached we should keep our Bibles open and follow the argument from the text, take notes, and ask God to help us see exactly how he wants us to apply this truth in our own lives.

Third, We become dull of hearing when we fail to obey the word of God.

If you want to begin moving forward again in your Christian life, begin with the truth you already know but have not been obeying. Ask yourself, *"Is there something that I God wants me to stop doing that I know is wrong?" "Has the word you have heard urging you to change your attitude, forgive someone, or reach out to help someone?"* You need to understand that God will give you no further light until you begin to obey the light you already have.

The first mark of spiritual immaturity is Dullness Toward the Word of God and...

The Second Mark of Spiritual Immaturity is the Inability To Share the Word (v. 12a) "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."

They could be compared to children who satisfied to remind in the first grade and continue through all the years of elementary school with learning anything above the first grade level. Yet how many Christians are satisfied to remain forever as they began, content with nothing more than the introductory truths.

The readers are reminded that they should be capable by this point in their Christian lives (having been saved for some time) of explaining the Christian faith to others. When he says they should be *"teachers"* he is not saying that every Christian can or should assume the position of teacher or preacher. But he is saying that *by this point in their Christian lives they should have something to share with others about their walk with God!*

The reality of the situation is that instead of being capable of sharing what they believe with others, they need to be taught all over again themselves. Verse twelve points out that if we do not go forward in our understanding of Christ the alternative is to fall back. There simply is no such thing as remaining where we are spiritually, we are either moving forward or we are falling back. We are either winning or we are losing.

One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression is dullness toward the things of God. Suddenly the Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, in fact anything spiritual is dull. The problem, however, is not usually with the Sunday School teacher or the Pastor, but with the hearer.

The second mark of spiritual immaturity is the *Inability To Share the Word and...*

The third mark of spiritual immaturity is An Insufficient Diet (vv. 12b-14)

"... and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

There comes a time in the life of every infant when they grow beyond the milk stage and develop a taste for solid food. Should this not happen it is always a matter for grave concern. To go on living on milk, mere baby food is indicative of arrested development. The same is true in the spiritual realm. A comparable situation in the church in

Corinth caused the Apostle Paul to write, *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. (2) 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..."* (1 Cor 3:1-2) Maturing believers should be moving on in their lives past the basics to the real meat of God's word.

Yet, we make a tragic mistake when we think that taking on solid food is just for the accumulation of knowledge. Yes, we need to know God's word, but right knowledge always leads to right living. The writer says in verse fourteen, *"... those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* The spiritual maturity of these believers will be demonstrated in a changed life.

It is unfortunate that the chapter division occurs at the end of verse fourteen for in verse one of Chapter six he clearly tells his readers what he expects them to do!

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection."

In the New King James Version the urging is to go on to *"perfection!"* I hasten immediately to add, this does not mean sinless perfection it is the word is a variation of (*telos*) which means *"mature or complete."* In 1 John 1:8 we are reminded by the Apostle John, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us!"* We are commanded to move on to maturity.

Major Ian Thomas once said, *"you know I have discovered an interesting thing about American Christians. They do not usually*

come to church to learn anything. Whatever they do not yet know themselves they think is heresy. What they want to hear is the same old stuff so they can say, 'Amen, brother, Amen!'" [Quoted by Ray Stedman.

"Let's Get On With It!" Heb 5:11-6-12. www.pbc.org/dp/Stedman/Hebrews1/0088.]

Application

Seven Rules for Growth

A person who is "born again" starts a new life similar to that of a newborn infant. Seven rules that promote good health in babies can be adapted and applied to a Christian's spiritual growth.

1. Daily Food. Take in the "pure milk of the word" through regular bible study.

2. Fresh Air. Pray often or you will faint. Prayer is the oxygen of the soul.

3. Regular Exercise. Put into practice what you learn in God's Word.

4. Adequate Rest. Rely on God at all times in simple faith.

5. Clean Surroundings. Avoid whatever will weaken you spiritually.

6. Loving Care. Be part of a church where you will benefit from a pastor's teaching and Christian fellowship.

7. Periodic Checkups. Regularly examine your spiritual health.

[Source unknown -www.bible.org/illus/Growth, cf. progress, maturity]