

**MOVING ON TO MATURITY**  
*The Remedy for Immaturity*  
Hebrews 5:11-14

Sometimes in our lives, we have those memorable “first ever” moments. I had one just yesterday. It was the one-year old birthday of my first grandchild, Rachel Lynne Blumhardt. I couldn’t resist showing you a picture. Now this is not of her birthday celebration. We’re going to have that Tuesday evening. But I’m sure she’ll enjoy that birthday cake more than she’s enjoying the Malt-O-Meal in this picture.

What do you notice about this picture? Well, I see several things. Beyond the fact that she’s the most beautiful granddaughter in the world, she’s ...

1. Dependent on her mom for nourishment. There you can see Rebecca patiently feeding Rachel Lynne her Malt-O-Meal.
2. She’s not yet at a point of taking in too much solid food. Rebecca doesn’t lay out a T-Bone steak in front of her and so, “Go at it, Rachel!” No, she’s getting there, but liquids and Malt-O-Meal are still high priority.
3. Something else. She’s messy. As with any one-year-old, there’s a lot of clean up to do after a meal.

Under normal conditions, Rachel Lynne is going to grow out of this stage (at least her mother hopes so!). But what if she didn’t? Can you picture Rachel Lynne at the age of twenty, sitting in a high chair, with her mom still feeding her Malt-O-Meal, and with food all over her face?

We say, “How ridiculous!” But the passage before us today tells us that there are many believers just like that. There are believers who grow old but never grow up. They’re still dependent on someone else to feed them spiritually. They can’t take solid food yet. And they lack the spiritual disciplines to move through a normal maturing process.

I’ve asked Glenwood McGeorge to read our passage this morning. As you listen, would you stand in honor of God and His Word?

<sup>11</sup> We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

<sup>13</sup> Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. <sup>6:1</sup> Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup> instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And God permitting, we will do so. Hebrews 5:11–6:3<sup>1</sup>

The passage before us today is all about growing up. It’s about moving on from immaturity to maturity. It’s about getting “unstuck” from a perpetual state of spiritual babyhood.

The passage answers for us three basic questions:

1. What does spiritual immaturity look like?
2. What does spiritual maturity look like?
3. What is the remedy for spiritual immaturity? Or, how do I move from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity?

Before looking at these questions, however, let's place this passage in its context. This past week we moved into a new major section of the letter to the Hebrews. All of chapters 1-4 have focused upon the superiority of the *person* of Christ. We have seen his exaltation to the right hand of God following his resurrection (1:5-14). We have also seen his promised dominion which will be experienced in his future, earthly kingdom (2:5-18).

In light of Christ's exaltation and dominion, we are given two exhortations or warnings. First, we must begin to pay more careful attention to what we have heard (2:1-4). And second, we are encouraged to "enter God's rest," i.e. Christ's rich reward for work well done (3:1-4:16).

This past week, however, we moved into the second major section of the book of Hebrews. Still focusing on the superiority of Christ, the writer now moves from focusing on Christ's *person* to an emphasis on Christ's *priesthood*. In last week's message, we saw that Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to be our High Priest *because of what he suffered*.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. All this talk about Jesus being a high priest...sounds interesting, but I really see no significance of this for my daily life. It's sort of like the other night. I sat down with Mary Alice to watch an installment of *Sense and Sensibility* on channel 10. Well, I lasted for about twenty minutes, long enough to eat my supper. But after that, I no longer saw any sense or sensibility in what was happening on the screen. I went to read a book. Some of you may feel that way right now. For some of us, Jesus Christ being our high priest may seem like some illusive, biblical thought with little or no practical implication for our daily lives.<sup>ii</sup> Maybe you're thinking, "I'll tune out here and plan my upcoming week."

If you're thinking that way, *that is precisely the problem*. Notice what the speaker says in verse 11:

"We have much to say about this, *but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.*"

## **I. WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL IMMATUREITY LOOK LIKE?**

Here, the speaker begins to tell us what spiritual immaturity looks like. And interestingly, the parallels with the baby in the high chair being spoon fed her breakfast are striking.

### **A. SPIRITUAL DULLNESS**

The first thing that characterizes spiritual immaturity is dullness – spiritual dullness. Remember, this letter is more of a sermon than a book. The speaker is standing in front of his hearers delivering this entire book as a spoken message. As he comes to this topic of Jesus' high priesthood and then mentions that Jesus is a high priest in "the order of Melchizedek," he can see

the perplexed glaze come over the eyes of his hearers (sort of like the glaze I see on some of your eyes right now!). Maybe some of them were starting to fall asleep in light of what they thought was quite a boring topic. What I *do* know is that none of them were “text-messaging” like a few to my right!

This subject of Jesus’ priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is “hard to explain,” the writer says. But the real problem is not so much the difficulty of the subject, but the dullness of the hearers. And in describing the hearers, he doesn’t mince his words. He cuts right to the chase. He says they are “slow to learn.” More literally “you have become dull of hearing.”

This same word “slow to learn” or “dull” is also used chapter 6, verse 12 where it is translated “lazy.” “We do not want you to become *lazy*, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” This descriptive word “dull” comes from two words in the language of the speaker, meaning “no push.” In other words, they had no drive, no motivation, they were spiritually lazy. The word was also used in this time period to refer to the numbed limbs of a sick lion. Due to this dullness, they were spiritually numb and sick.

More than this, it’s not just a problem of being slow learners. God works with each of us as we are and with how he has made us. Whether intellectually, physically, or spiritually, some grow more quickly than others. But the problem here is more than that. He says, “you *have become* dull of hearing.”<sup>iii</sup> Apparently, these believers are less responsive now than they were at the beginning! Spiritual sluggishness has set in and they are stuck!

Have you ever met a Christian like that? Have you ever met someone who has been a Christian for a long time, but they seem far less responsive to God’s Word and far less passionate about being a follower of Jesus than the druggie who was just converted the week before? I have. In fact, I meet them all the time. And sometimes that person is me!

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want this kind of spiritual paralysis to slip into my life. I want to keep growing up as I grow old. I want God to teach me new things. I want to see my faith stretched. I want to experience God in new and fresh ways.

## **B. SPIRITUAL DEPENDENCY**

That’s the first characteristic of spiritual immaturity: spiritual dullness. Here’s the second: *dependency on others for spiritual nourishment*. This is in verse 12:

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again...

These believers were growing old, but they were not growing up. Apparently, we have here a first century church full of gray haired babies where the pastor is the chief diaper changer! Some of these believers had grown old without growing up. For some of these believers, it was probably nearly thirty years now that they had been taught. And yet they were still at a point of being dependent on others to teach them, rather than actively teaching and investing in the lives of others themselves!!

I believe the preacher, here, places his finger on one of the most serious maladies of the contemporary church. We place such an emphasis on big-name personalities, speakers or writers, feeding on them like leeches. But so many Christians never come to a point where they in turn are teaching, mentoring and actively investing in the lives of younger believers themselves.

He's not saying that everybody should have the spiritual gift of teaching. He is saying that any believer who has is steadily making progress towards maturity will demonstrate this by passing on what they have learned to other younger believers. They will move from merely receiving to giving. They will move from merely being taught to teaching. They will move from merely being served to serving.

What about you? How many in this congregation have been believers for more than five years? Raise your hand. That's a lot! Now keep your hands up (and this is going to be a little difficult, but I believe it's important to allow this passage to speak to us!) – how many of you who have been Christians for more than five years are actively mentoring, teaching or in some way intentionally investing in the life of at least one younger believer? If you are, keep your hands up.

### C. SPIRITUAL SHALLOWSNESS

But why are these believers not actively teaching and investing in the lives of others? In this case, it's not just that they have chosen not to. It's rather that they can't, because they are stuck. They are stuck in a state of spiritual shallowness. They've never moved on to solid spiritual food. Look again at verse 12:

You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with<sup>iv</sup> the teaching about righteousness.

The expression “elementary truths” is an expression used in that day to refer to the letters of the alphabet. So he's referring, you might say, to the a-b-c's of the gospel. He's saying, “You guys really ought to be teachers of others, but *you are acting as if* you need to be taught once again the basic elements of the gospel...the a-b-c's of Christian truth.”<sup>v</sup>

He even spells out for us just what these a-b-c's are in the first few verses of chapter six.<sup>vi</sup> If you want to know more about this, check out the notes for this message on our church web page. These are all the “a-b-c's” of the gospel. They are very necessary, but not sufficient for full-fledged growth in Christ. But that's where these believers were stuck. In other words, these believers are stuck in spiritual babyhood.

Spiritual babyhood is really a beautiful thing. Peter says, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2-3). There's nothing I like better than to watch my granddaughter drink out of her sippy cup and eat her Malt-O-Meal. But if she were still doing that 10 years from now, I would know there is a problem!<sup>vii</sup>

## II. WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL MATURITY LOOK LIKE?

We've asked the question, "What does spiritual immaturity look like?" But now, what about spiritual maturity?

### A. SOLID FOOD

The spiritually mature person is characterized by spiritual depth. Spiritually mature have a constant intake of "solid food." Verse 14 says:

But solid food is for the mature,<sup>viii</sup> who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

It makes perfect sense that the speaker uses the illustration here of solid food. What happens when you eat solid food? It becomes a part of what you are. It goes into your digestive track and then, except for the waste, becomes who you are! Spiritual truth is to be like that. The deeper teachings of God's Word – our identity with Christ, the priesthood of Christ, and who we are as the Body of Christ – are to become part of us, affecting our decisions and lifestyle on a daily basis.

### B. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Not only is there spiritual depth. There is also spiritual discipline. The speaker describes the "mature" Christian as one who has by constant use of solid spiritual food *trained himself* to distinguish between good and evil. He uses an interesting word, the word *gumnazo*, that looks and sounds like our word *gymnasium*. It means "to exercise" or to "enter into training."

Does that characterize your Christian life? Or are you more of a spiritual couch potato? You see, the believer on his way to maturity makes constant use of the solid biblical nourishment he is given. He is not only putting it into application in his or her own life, but is actively passing on that spiritual truth to others.

On the other hand, the immature Christian is sort of like a well-know sea in southern Israel. The Jordan river flows into this sea from the north. But there is no outlet. The water just stays there. There's no where for it to go. And do you know what this sea is called? It's called the Dead Sea. And it's dead because there is no outlet. But the mature Christian has that "outlet." He is constantly putting into practice what he's received and is actively passing it onto others. Are you?

A great pianist once said that if he stopped practicing for one day, he noticed the loss. If he stopped for two days, his friends noticed. And if he stopped for three days, the public noticed it. The other day, Justin had his trumpet lesson at home. His teacher stopped by because the school, where they normally have the lesson, was closed. As I was working in another part of the house, I heard him say to Justin, "Justin, just a little every day; but you've got to practice every day!" It's the old adage, "Use it or lose it!"

That's the pathway to maturity in the Christian life. By the constant use of the solid spiritual food we receive, we train ourselves. And as we pass it on to others, we train them, too!

### **C. MORAL AND DOCTRINAL DISCERNMENT**

Finally, the mature Christian is characterized by both moral and doctrinal discernment. Again, verse 14 says:

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves *to distinguish good from evil.*

The mature Christian not only has depth and discipline. He also has discernment. He's able to distinguish between good and evil. You see, spiritual maturity is not just a matter of more biblical information. It comes rather from the act of putting that information to use in making wise decisions. *No matter how much biblical knowledge you might have, growth stops when you no longer use that biblical information to make wise choices in the moral decisions of life.*

However, the verse is not only talking about moral decisions. I believe that he is also referring to doctrinal discernment. In Hebrews 13:9 he says, "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings." The mature Christian is not only growing morally. He is also growing doctrinally. That means that the mature Christian is not

## **III. HOW DO I MOVE FROM IMMATURITY TO MATURITY?**

How do we move towards maturity? It's interesting that the speaker doesn't say here, "O.K. you guys, here's a refresher course in basic Christian doctrine. Let's get back to the basics." No, he rather says, "Let's move on from the basics towards maturity." How do we do that?

### **A. DECISION**

First of all, there's got to be a decision. This is implied, in fact more than implied, verse 1 of chapter 6: "Therefore, *let us leave...and go on to maturity.*" That takes a decision. You see, these believers were wavering in their faith. They were thinking about ditching it all and going back to some form of Judaism. They had a decision to make. You probably aren't facing the same kind of decision. I doubt there is anyone here this morning who is thinking about converting to the Jewish faith. But you may be stuck spiritually, just like these believers were. You think you're going nowhere, when in reality you're going backwards. You're regressing rather than progressing. And you too need to make a decision. Am I going to move on with Jesus Christ? Or am I going to regress? I would remind you – there's no middle ground.

In verse 3 he says, "And this we will do!" That is, there is a commitment to move on to maturity. Can you say this? "Yes, this I will do!"

### **B. DISCIPLINE**

Obviously, any decision on our part has to be followed up with discipline. We've already seen that discipline is one of the primary characteristics of the mature Christian. Paul writes to his

young son in the faith, Timothy: “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, *train yourself to be godly*. (1 Timothy 4:7). In deciding to move on to maturity, you are making a decision to enter into the spiritual disciplines that the march towards maturity demands.

### C. DEPENDENCY UPON GOD

But you know, it’s not all about what you can do. Spiritual maturity is ultimately the work of God in our lives. Verse one of chapter 6 reads more literally like this: “Let us *be carried onto this maturity...*” He is saying that this process of maturity is not only what *we* do, but what *we do* in dependence upon the power and grace of God. And that’s why he ends in verse 3 by adding: “*And God permitting, we will do so.*” By saying, “God permitting,” he is simply recognizing that ultimately our growth to maturity is a work of God. We must do it, we are responsible for it, but only in dependence upon God’s power and grace.

---

<sup>i</sup> The big idea of this passage is: The remedy for spiritual immaturity is the constant use of deeper biblical truths. The applicational intent of the passage seems to be: See our people recognize the danger of being stuck in a state of spiritual immaturity and make a commitment to learn, practice and teach the deeper truths of God’s Word.

<sup>ii</sup> Remember, when we began this series, we talked about two ways in which Jesus Christ as our high priest is practical and relevant to us in our everyday life. Do you remember what they are? First, Jesus as high priest *identifies* with us – with our struggles, our temptations, our weaknesses. And that is what last week’s message brought out so clearly. The very fact that Jesus, when faced with all the onslaught of hell itself, was both not able to sin and able not to sin, makes him uniquely qualified to help you and me in our point of greatest temptation. But not only does Jesus identify with us, he also *intercedes* for us. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” He is “able to *save completely...*!” – not just from hell, but from the temptation to drift far from God, and in so doing to sacrifice that “rest” we’ve been talking about – Christ’s rich reward for work well done. Why is he able to do this? Because he is always interceding for you and me! Think about it – Jesus is praying for you! In your moment of greatest struggle, of greatest weakness, Jesus is praying for you. And I imagine he is doing so even with “cries and tears,” just as we saw that he prayed in that Garden of Gethsemane before he went to the cross. It’s in light of all of this that we come to the passage for today, Hebrews 5:11-14 which begins the third major warning passage in the book. We can entitle this warning section, which runs from 5:11 up through 6:20, “Go onto maturity.” In fact, this is the theme of the entire book of Hebrews, “Moving onto Maturity.” So if we’re going to get the main message of this book, we better grasp a hold of what the author is saying to us in these verses!

<sup>iii</sup> He uses the same expression in verse 12: “*You have become* those who need milk.” Compare the reading of The New American Standard Bible: “*you have become* dull of hearing.”

<sup>iv</sup> The idea of not being “acquainted with” speaks more specifically of “inexperience.” The speaker is not concerned about an informational deficiency. It is rather an experiential deficiency. These Hebrew believers had a pretty good intellectual grasp on their Bibles, which at that time was largely composed of the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, they probably better understood their Old Testament Scriptures than most of us do! Their deficiency was not so much intellectual as experiential.

<sup>v</sup> The writer could be saying that they needed to get back to the “a-b-c’s” of Christian life and teaching. And yet this would be strange, because in 6:1 he tells them to do just the opposite. He tells them to “leave the first principles” and press on to maturity.

<sup>vi</sup> Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ ...not laying again... [and he lists these “elementary teachings” in three sets of twos]:

1. ...the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God;
2. ...instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands;
3. ...the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

I’m not going to go into detail on each one of these except to say this:

1. Repentance and faith obviously refer to the conversion experience when these believers turned from depending upon their own good works to save them and placed their faith in God.
2. Instruction about baptisms and laying on of hands refers to what often immediately followed conversion. We instructed those who were baptized today in the difference between spirit baptism and water baptism, for example.

Lastly, the “resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” is the most basic teaching about future things and what will happen when Christ returns. Here were different baptisms in the New Testament as Acts 19 makes clear. But why does he mention these particular points and not others? It may be because it was these issues that were being questioned by those who were considering reverting back to their Jewish faith and practice. For example, if those hearing this message or later reading this letter were about to revert to a form of Judaism, then they would be once again adopting a system of dead works that could never save. They would in doing so deny that their initial faith had actually “saved” them. Furthermore, they would probably undergo another baptism that would associate them with a sectarian community of Jews, such as that found at Qumran. They would also once again adopt their disbelief in the resurrection of the body and of eternal judgment.

<sup>vii</sup> And that’s why the writer uses the word “infant” in 5:13 to describe these Christians. The word means “immature.” There’s nothing wrong with acting like an infant when you’re an infant. But when you become an adult <sup>viii</sup> The maturity spoken of here is not only referred to 5:14, but also in 5:9. There Christ is “made mature” or “perfected” *through the sufferings he experienced.*