

***Hebrews 5:11-6:3. <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. 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.***

### **Pursue Spiritual Maturity**

School starts tomorrow. Well, at least for St. John Redwood Falls. School starts on Monday, and children who were formerly in kindergarten enter the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and those who were formerly in the 1<sup>st</sup> enter the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and so on. And as this happens we are reminded of the natural progression of learning that occurs as children grow up and mature. They receive the basic building blocks, which are never really forgotten, but they move beyond the simple things and go on to more advanced subjects and lessons as they continue in their education. They grow. They advance. They mature. They build on the learning year to year, really day to day.

At least that is the goal that a teacher works with the student to achieve. Every day, in just about every class, a teacher will have to deal with students that will demonstrate basically three different kinds of attitudes in their learning. There are those who are driven. Those who belong to this group want to learn, they want to progress. They want to grow in their knowledge and they don't mind being challenged. Then there are those who are not so driven. They do just enough to get by. They really do not like to be challenged. They would rather depend on what they already learned. And the third category of student (which is where, frankly, the majority of students fit in) are those who simply fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

Today the writer to the Hebrews is not interested in what kind of student we were in elementary school, but he is concerned about what kind of spiritual attitudes we have. Today he calls on us to examine our spiritual attitudes and learning personalities. Are we driven? Are we not so driven? Or are we somewhere in between?

The writer to the Hebrews calls on his readers to be driven and invested in their spiritual growth. He uses the language of education and growth into maturity to spur on his readers to learn more about their God. After all, there is so much to learn about him. There is so much to learn about his will for our life. There is no time to regress, to stand still or go backwards, but we must progress. We must grow. We must advance in our

knowledge of our God and his will for our life. We must mature in our faith. And so today, the writer to the Hebrews, challenges us to **pursue spiritual maturity. As we do this we to: treasure the elementary truths of scripture and we are to build upon the foundation of Christ.**

When the writer to the Hebrews tells his readers to leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, he is not minimizing the simple gospel. But he was trying to get these Christians to examine their spiritual attitude. It seemed like these Hebrew Christians had become too much like that second category of students. It seemed like they were not very driven. It seemed that at least a good portion of them were fine with having a basic knowledge about Jesus and they lacked a desire to build upon this foundation. They lacked the desire to know more about God and his will for their life. They were happy to do just enough to get by and as a result they had become lazy and lethargic when it came to learning more about God and his will for their lives.

At least one of their spiritual teachers was none too happy about this. Frustrated by their stale spirituality the author of this book of Hebrews reprimands his readers for their lack of growth and spiritual maturity. He writes, ***<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!*** The author of this letter (possibly Paul or someone else we are not entirely sure who wrote the book of Hebrews) had much to share with his readers. He wanted to speak to them of deep spiritual truths. He wanted to speak of the marvelous symbolism of the sacrifices and the office of high priest that were fulfilled in Christ, but they were not ready. It was not that the biblical concepts were too complex or too difficult to be properly explained. The problem was, "They were slow to learn". They were slow to learn, but it was not that they did not have enough time to hear and comprehend the teachings of God. In fact we are told that they had so much time to listen and comprehend that "by this time you ought to be teachers" the author laments. The sad reality was that they were slow to learn because they had grown disinterested. They had regressed in their knowledge. Not wanting to be challenged, not wanting to grow, they had settled for what they already knew. The original Greek paints this sad event in more illustrative way using a word that meant "numbed" or "dulled". Ears that once had been sharp, attentive, eager to hear were now dulled and numbed and unable to receive deep truths.

This was frustrating for this spiritual teacher who had so much to share with these Hebrew Christians. But the writer to the Hebrews does not write these words simply to single out these Christians and drag them over the coals, but he writes these words with a great concern for these people. To review the basic ABC's of the faith was fine and good, to revisit the simple gospel was certainly beneficial. But the teacher's concern here was the overall attitude of spiritual learning that these believers were displaying. They were comfortable being lazy. It seemed that they were content to settle. They lacked a desire to advance and this was not healthy. This is not how things are to work.

As surely as an a 1<sup>st</sup> grader moves on to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, as surely as an infant moves from milk to solid food, so too the Christian moves forward and upward. A Christian builds upon the simple gospel in order to advance in the knowledge of God. Babies are not to remain babies and neither are those in adulthood to revert back to childhood. Growth is necessary, and spiritually speaking that growth comes from the “constant use” of God’s Word. It means the constant hearing of God’s Word regularly in worship. It means constantly digging into and handling God’s Word through meaningful bible study. It means growing and learning and maturing. There is no such thing as standing still in Christianity.

However if one looks at modern day Christianity, as a whole the message of many churches has almost been over simplified. One MLC professor once put it this way that for many churches the extent of their theology is really: “God is nice. We should be nice. Isn’t that nice?” If this is all a church stands for no wonder people find church lacking. If there is no call to grow in the knowledge of God’s love, if there is no push to learn more about the riches of God’s Word, what’s the point really? What’s the point if I know it all already?

And sadly that is the type of thinking that many of us fall into. That is the type of thinking that our lazy flesh likes. After all we know that Jesus died for the sins of the world. We have that pure spiritual milk. We have that gospel. We should be all set. I don’t really need to study the bible. I don’t really need to learn much more. After all, everything I need to know about God and Jesus, I learned in Sunday School, right?

Well, not exactly. God tells us in his word that we indeed are to crave that pure spiritual milk that many of us received as small children in Sunday School. We are to confess proudly that Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. We are to proudly confess that Jesus died to take away my sins. He rose so that I can go to heaven and now out of thanks I should live for him. These are the truths that we are to hold on to and pass down to future generations. We are to return to this good news often. We are to treasure these simple truths and crave this spiritual milk. But we are to build upon this faith. We are to build upon this faith for our whole life through.

As we grow towards maturity we are to treasure the elementary truths of scripture and then build on these truths as you grow into maturity. You are not going to spend a lot of time in Sunday School explaining the doctrine of election or the book of Revelation. You are not going to spend a lot of time at soccer camp teaching children about how God wants us to correctly handle our finances and be good stewards of our time and talents. These children need to know about Jesus. They need to know about a God who loved them so much he died for them and rose again. We need to know this too, but we also need to build on this faith that God gives us. And God has given us so much with which to build.

The Bible is banquet of information to feast upon and a bottomless well to draw from as we search to learn more about God and his will for our life. We can marvel at the symbolism and the meaning of the sacrifices and Jesus’ role as our great high priest.

(That is what the writer to the Hebrews wanted to teach his readers). We can learn of God's patience and love and faithfulness as the pages of the Old Testament open up to us. We can learn from God's Word what God has to say about how he has established institutions like marriage, family, and government. Instead of letting mainstream media, popular opinions, or even our own ideas shape and distort our opinions we are to search the scriptures and learn about what God says about the end times, what he says about the roles of men and women, what he says about stewardship and fellowship, and what he says about the church.

God wants us to grow closer to him. He wants us to walk closer to him. He wants us to be able to apply his word to our life. He wants to be driven in our learning to say to him, "Teach me!" "Teach me how to be a better father." "Teach me how to be a better mother!" "Teach me to be a better husband." "Teach or a better wife." "Teach me to know you better, to know your Word, to learn of your love, to learn of your will for my life." "Teach me your ways, so that I may walk in your truth."

Dear friends, in Christ, pursue spiritual maturity and growth in your knowledge of him who loves you because God wants to teach us. He wants us to teach us his ways. He wants to teach us how to be better neighbors and better employers and employees. He wants us to grow in our ability to deliver words of comfort and words of encouragement to our fellow believers, to our friends, and family. He wants us to be better able to defend our faith when others attack it. He wants us to have a richer understanding of his love and his care for us, to know what baptism and the Lord's Supper really are and really mean for us. He wants us to know what repentance is, and what it looks like in our lives. Built on the precious truths of Christ he wants us to grow in our faith and press on toward that goal of spiritual maturity continually.

The word maturity is translated from a word that also means completion and perfection. That's a goal that we will never reach, but that doesn't mean that we should give up trying. It doesn't mean that we should just shrug our shoulders and settle for the easy knowledge that we already have. But it means that we should just keep on growing. Day after day be in his Word. Be fed by the Spirit and he will make you grow. Pick up your bibles. Dig out those catechisms. Pick up a book from the church library. Come to bible class when it is offered. Refresh and grow in your knowledge in a bible information class. Read your meditations and read through the Forward in Christ magazine. Find helpful devotions online. And this is just a small sampling of the rich banquet that your Savior puts before you; This is the food that fills us up, makes us grow, and gives us eternal life. This is something that we are to do whether it is the middle of August, the end of May, or the middle of summer. This is something that we can do each and every day of the year. We are to enjoy the bread of life, Christ Jesus, and he will see to it that we will grow up and be strengthened in his word. Amen.