

MOVING TOWARD MATURITY

Coming of Age

TEXT: Heb.5:12-6:3

INTRODUCTION: The passage upon which the sermon is based today is one of the key passages of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 5:12 – 6:12 declares the heart of the message of the writer, and thus the Holy Spirit, to the hearers. This passage is essential in understanding the spiritual condition of the recipients of the letter; and at the same time, understanding who the recipients were, helps us to understand the meaning of this passage.

These verses contain a strong rebuke to the Jewish believers to whom this letter was sent. They should be moving toward maturity in Christ, but they are not. **The Spirit of God**

- **chastises them for their lack of progress,**
- **tells them what they should be doing,**
- **warns them of what may happen if they fail to mature,**
- **then challenges and encourages them to do better.**

We will see the chastising and informing in this message. The warning will be in the next, and the challenge and encouraging in the one to follow.

INTRODUCTION: **Sometimes God sends His Word to comfort the afflicted, but other portions of the Scripture God sent to afflict the comforted.** The text we read today is one of those passages. Woe to us if we are selective about which portions of the Bible we are willing to read and to heed. Remember the purposes of the Holy Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

The text today contains all four of those elements, but it is heavy on reproof and correction. Remember, however, the author of this message to us is God. He loves us and wants the best for us. He only rebukes for our benefit. Therefore let us be wise and give heed to His Words, even if they make us terribly uncomfortable.

Heb.5:12-6:3 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. 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. ³ And this we will do if God permits.

I. BY THIS TIME

A. In the Christian life, some things happen in an instant.

1. Salvation, being born again
2. Forgiveness of your sin
3. Adoption into God's family
4. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
5. Citizenship in Heaven
6. Access to the great High Priest

B. But most things happen over time, as we allow Christ to work in our lives to make us fully what He wants us to be.

1. Victory over habitual sin
2. Putting off the old man
3. Putting on the new man
4. Developing the character of Christ
5. Faithfully exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit

C. A great tragedy is that many people get saved, but they remain in spiritual infancy.

D. Another tragedy is that some saved people grow in the Lord toward maturity but then they stall in their progress and begin to regress back to spiritual infancy.

E. Where should you be?

1. Saved a year? OK to still be in spiritual infancy.
2. Saved 2 years? You should be a young but rapidly growing Christian.
3. Saved 3 years or more? You should have some of the marks of maturity evident in your life.

By this time, the author of Hebrews says to the believers,

II. YOU SHOULD BE SKILLED IN THE WORD OF GOD.

A. Everyone starts with the milk of the Word - Scriptures dealing with fundamental doctrines.

- 1. Repentance, Salvation, Baptism**
- 2. Resurrection, Eternal Judgment**

B. We are not to stay with only partaking of milk.

- 1. We are to move on to an understanding of all of Scripture.**
- 2. We should learn doctrine and theology and ecclesiology.**
- 3. We should learn about the beginnings and the end of times.**
- 4. We should understand about God's chosen people and the church and the similarities and differences between them.**

C. We should all grow to where our knowledge would be sufficient for us to be teachers of the Word.

1. May not all have gift of teaching.
2. We should not all be teachers.
3. But we should all grow into the knowledge of the Word that is adequate for teaching.

D. How skilled are you in the Word of God?

1. Can you find any reference in the Bible reasonably quickly?
2. How many times have you read the Bible through?
 - a. Can read through the Bible in one year by giving 15 to 20 minutes a day.
3. Can you name the major sections of the Scriptures and tell someone the essence of what they are about?
4. Can you walk someone through the Scriptures that would show them how to be saved?
5. Can you go to the Scriptures to help clarify major Bible doctrines and teachings?
6. Do you know the Bible well enough that when you face a moral decision that Scripture comes to mind to guide you and give you discernment?

E. How old are you in the Lord?

1. Saved in the last year? Look what you have to look forward to.
2. Saved in last two years? These are some of the very things you should be engaged in learning as a young Christian.

3. Saved more than three years. If you cannot answer yes, this rebuke from the Holy Spirit of God is for you.

III. WE ARE TO MOVE ON TO MATURITY.

- A. **In our ministry to fellow believers.** 6:10 For God *is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*
- B. **In our sanctification (being made like Christ.)** 10:14 For by one offering He *has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*
- C. **In our endurance of suffering.** 10:32 But recall the former days in which, *after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:*
- D. **In living our lives, walking by faith. (all of Heb. 11)**
- E. **In our aversion to sin.** 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by *so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*
- F. **In our faithfulness to our calling.** 12:1 “*run with endurance.*”

CONCLUSION:

Gary Thomas tells the story of two women who were planting a vegetable garden. On the same day, they prepared the earth and planted their seeds. One then neglected her garden and waited for her vegetables to grow. The other woman worked in her garden regularly. She put cages around the young tomato plants, she drove in sticks beside those vegetable plants that were going to grow up high, and she put netting around plants that were particularly attractive to rabbits and other animals.

Several months later the two women went out for the harvest. One found tomatoes rotting on the ground. Beans whose vines had spread among the other plants, weeds that were choking most of the carrots – all of which had been raided by birds and squirrels. She pulled up a handful of food and figured that planting a garden wasn't worth it – the food wasn't as good, the harvest was small, and, well, grocery stores were so much more convenient.

Her neighbor, however, harvested basketfuls of good vegetables every other day, which

had a better taste than those in the grocery store. She figured that, when everything was added up, she probably saved a good fifteen to twenty percent on her grocery bill during the summer months. Both women planted, but only one tended.

I've known Christians who have committed their lives to following Christ at about the same time; but the influence this commitment had on their lives soon became markedly different. One lived a life of self-absorption. Christianity made sense, but it became almost a convenience – no need to take it too seriously or to reorder one's life around it. The other person, however, took a different approach. She found ways to make Bible study a regular part of her life. She kept her prayer life fresh and varied. New attributes came to the forefront, and before she knew it, people were asking her for advice and counseling. She soon had a bona fide ministry, almost by accident.

Both planted a spiritual garden, but only one tended.

If we tend our garden, we'll have plenty of food with which to feed others. If we give our garden just cursory attention, we may have enough food just to feed ourselves. If we completely neglect our garden, we're going to be so hungry we'll become "consumer" Christians, feeding off others.

(Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discovering the Soul's Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 2000), 215-216, 220.)

Are the marks of maturity ever increasing in your life?

Are you as skilled in the Word of God as you ought to be for your spiritual age?

Then one of two things need to happen?

- Either you need to become a babe in Christ by faith in Him. OR
- You need to get out of the nursery and start growing up. "Let us leave these elementary things... and go on to maturity."