

There is a dangerous spiritual problem that can creep into our lives, and that is the problem of stagnation, of not growing, of remaining immature for too long, the problem of not going on to become the complete person that Jesus died for you to become. It is very hard to break out of this disastrous spiritual pattern, because, often, we simply do not see our own immaturity or lack of progress. And it takes something very direct, and perhaps dramatic, to wake us up to our dire need to grow up....it may take something like THIS bold and honest passage of scripture that is before us this morning!

The reality is that some believers are just not as far along as they should be. Some of us HERE are not as far along as we should be. In one sense that could be said of everyone! But there is a very real problem that SOME do not go on to maturity while others do!

The author of Hebrews is very direct. "You've become dull of hearing, you still need milk not solid food". "You ought to be teaching others by now but you still need others to teach you". "You need to move forward from the elementary things about Jesus, and go on to maturity." There are things in our lives that were understandable at the early stages of knowing Jesus, but those are no longer appropriate, or safe for us! They now place us in grave spiritual danger!

There is such an emphasis in the Bible of lavishing encouragement upon God's people, commending believers for their faith, and perseverance, love, acknowledging their gifts. I firmly believe this is one of our main ministries to one another!

But sometimes we need to be called out of our immature thinking, and immature spirituality. Sometimes we need to hear the things in

this passage! Sometimes we need to hear, “You should be further along! You should be further along than to be thinking like you are thinking. You should be further along than to talk like you are talking. By now you should be feeding others, showing others the way. You should have more discernment about what is from God, and what is not.

The point is not to humiliate, or to put people down, or to make people feel bad, or to overwhelm anyone with a sense of failure. But the purpose of the Holy Spirit in these verses is to awaken us to the danger of NOT growing! And to call us to go on! To press ahead. The final point is “Let us go on to maturity in Christ”.

John said, “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name”.... “I am writing to you young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one”. Forgiveness of our sins is our inheritance as children in the gospel. But everyone who is born of God is to GO ON to be strong young men, to overcome sin and evil. Not perfectly, but substantially!

There is a very real spiritual battle going on in our world, in your world, a battle for your heart and your soul! It is a battle largely fought in your mind and thoughts! There is good and evil, sin and righteousness, purity and impurity, light and darkness, worldliness and godliness. And once we are united to Jesus, we begin a life of choosing light instead of darkness, good instead of evil.

In this passage from Hebrews 5 those who are mature are mature because they have practiced making these continual distinctions between good and evil. Verse 14 They are “those who have their

powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil”. Those going on to maturity are listening to the Spirit, following the Spirit, putting to death sinful inclinations, attitudes, ways of living, and ungodly ideas. They are eagerly learning what pleases the Lord, aggressively putting off the old self and putting on the new self, saying “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions.

This practice of obedience, is the breaking point between maturity and remaining in immaturity. In the mature, this careful sorting out of good from evil, is constantly practiced, in words, and attitudes and choices throughout the day, every day, in the home, in marriage, in all relationships and interactions of life, choosing good over evil, the Spirit over the flesh, the new self over the old self.

In a biography of T Austin Sparks, the author said, “He was earnestly pursuing Christ and learning to live by the inner sense of God’s life within him”. He was “..a man who truly knew God’s life within, and did not do things which would grieve that life”.... “he became well atuned to the inward sense of what was pleasing to the Lord, and what was not.”

This kind of regular daily practice gives us and increasing ability to discern what is good and evil, an increasing ability to discern false teaching, worldly thinking, ungodly attitudes. And to discern things that are true, and praiseworthy and good and pleasing to God.

Another mark of the mature person, is they appreciate and benefit from (deeper teaching in spiritual things) what this verse calls, “solid food”. They have an appetite to learn more, to know Christ better,

to know and experience all that Christ died to give them. Teaching along these lines is a joy to them and they eagerly pursue it. They are willing and able to dig into difficult passages that will help them know more about Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Another mark of the mature is that they are teaching others, speaking helpful truths from God into the lives of others. With healthy growth comes the inclination, and the passion, to shepherd others, to help others along in the Lord.

Also...Those who are mature, are not complacent, but they press on to know Christ more. this passage ends with an earnest plea to go on to this maturity in Christ! In Philippians 3:16 Paul said, “This one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and STRAINING toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things”.

This maturity is available for all believers and it is God’s will for all. Paul said, the goal of all ministry is to build us up, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming”.

But this passage in Hebrews is not primarily about those who are making progress. It is a message is for those who have stalled out spiritually and are not going on to maturity in Christ. So we are going to get to that now. And there are things here for us ALL to

learn, so that we all guard ourselves against complacency and stagnation.

The author of Hebrews diagnoses the problem of spiritual immaturity so clearly, that he leaves no place for us to hide! So I am not going to try to soften his message. This diagnoses might be hard to hear but it is necessary to avoid these dangers!

First: Those who remain in immaturity are... Uninterested and unaffected by teaching. Verse 11 “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing”. They had become spiritually lazy or lackadaisical, uninterested, indifferent. This is not an intellectual problem, it is an inner disposition or attitude of heart. Instead of eagerly receiving the message, a person can shut down, and nothing sinks in, nothing makes a difference. Teaching leaves them bored and unchanged.

The author of Hebrews has some wonderful things to teach about the High Priestly work of Christ in heaven, which would greatly encourage and build up the faith of these Jewish believers. But he knows, even though they have been Christians for many years, they are only able to receive “milk”. They are uninterested in hearing these deeper truths that could help them. They don’t want to hear anything from God, that is hard, or difficult to understand, even though it might be the very thing they need to give them courage to go on!

He helps them see how their lack of interest in further teaching has held them in spiritual childhood. “You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child”.

In our men's Bible study, we have studied David, Moses, Abraham, Joseph, the judges, Jeremiah, and the life of Jesus. Some of what we have covered has been very challenging. Many weeks, I would come up to a difficult chapter, or one that would arouse hard questions about God, and I would think, this is crazy, let's do something very simple and basic. But I am convinced that hearing God speak to us in the Bible is the way we grow up and become mature, AND I am convinced that we need to keep pressing on to solid food. A W Tozier said, "Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian". Because we find Christ in the whole Bible!

*Second: Those who remain in immaturity are not teaching, or helping other along in the Lord. Verse 12 "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again...". Teaching here is not the spiritual gift of teaching or public teaching, but has to do with the kind of personal teaching we do with our words and our lives every minute of every day.

Those who do not grow up spiritually still hold many wrong attitudes and perspectives, and they are just not able to speak God's truths into others lives. They are not thinking God's thoughts themselves, so they can't teach others. They need someone to correct them and go over basic Christian truths again with them.

Those who remain in immaturity never move on to take initiative to think about others, to help and encourage and teach others, in some way. They usually remain focused on themselves and their feelings.

The solution isn't just to start teaching others, but to RESPOND to teaching with eagerness to learn and change and grow, in such a way that we are ABLE to teach and pour out our lives for others.

*Those who remain in immaturity are NOT making daily choices between good and evil. If those who are mature have much practice at discerning good and evil. Then...those who are not going on to maturity, are not practicing this careful obedience.

Verse 13 in the NIV says, "Anyone who lives on milk, still being an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness". The BSB says, "inexperienced in the message of righteousness". And that is contrasted with the mature who have practiced discerning between good and evil.

Those who do not grow up, are not PRACTICING this constant sorting out of good and evil. They are not making this critical distinction, THEREFORE harmful thoughts and practices are allowed to remain in their lives. They live and speak and act with a kind of spiritual recklessness. They live and speak without this filter of spiritual discernment. Often they don't filter out anger, and complaining, bitterness, envy, selfish ambition, so these things continue to manifest. They may not filter out false teaching or worldly ways of thinking about life and its issues. They are not carefully choosing what is true and good and praiseworthy, things that please the Lord.

If we hear the word of righteousness taught, and then go home and yell at our spouse or give them the silent treatment, or we grumble about our circumstances, or harbor petty and critical thoughts of other people, we short circuit the process of spiritual growth.

How do we deal with the realization that we are not as far along as we should be by this time in our walk with God?

*First: Admit, with genuine sorrow, that you have not progressed in Christ as you should. This is not flippantly saying, nobody is perfect, I guess I could do better. It is saying, perhaps with tears, I've been at this place far too long!

*Make a decision to be interested in God's word and especially all that is revealed about Christ, in the whole Bible. Decide that you are not going to tune out during the teaching. Decide that you will no longer be "unaccustomed to the word of righteousness".

*Make daily righteousness, choosing good over evil, your constant practice! Get up in the morning...Bow down, submit your will, your thoughts your attitudes, your emotions, and your ideas to Christ. Choose to carefully discern between good and evil, in your attitudes, in your words, your moral choices, your philosophy of life (Taking every thought captive, destroying...)!

It is this inward, personal fight, of faithfully choosing righteous attitudes and words and activities, hour by hour, day in and day out, that makes a person mature. Your senses will become trained (verse 14 says) by practice and you can smell a sin and evil a mile away! You will be able to see what is the good and righteous way to go.

There are a thousand false voices out there! Most of them enter through our minds. We need to practice discernment all the time!

*Make the choice to go on toward maturity in Christ. 6:1

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...”. The NASB says “let us press on to maturity”. It is a choice. It is something you decide to direct your life toward this goal or not! By the enabling help of God and the Holy Spirit, we say, we are going on to maturity in Christ. Spiritual growth is NOT something that just happens to some and doesn't happen to others with no rhyme or reason!

We all decide in our hearts how we will respond to this call. Young person, this call to maturity is given to you. Many of the young people here this morning will go on to know Christ, to enjoy Christ, to live fruitful lives. But there will be some among your Christian friends who do not. They will become disinterested in spiritual things. You must decide to be among those who go on!

Those adults among must decide how we respond to this call. If you have been growing physically older but not more mature and more spiritual, you must decide to go on, to break free from that! Not all go on to maturity. If there has been some complacency or stagnation, repent of that and decide before the Lord this morning that you want to be among those who go on to full maturity in Christ.