

Growing in Maturity

Hebrews 5:7-6:3

Big Idea:

Spiritual growth and maturity is the call of God in His children's lives. We must be actively seeking to grow in Christ, through the empowerment of the Spirit and the resource of the Scriptures.

Hebrews 5:7-6:3

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

This is the Word of the LORD:

Thanks be to God!

Christlike Growth

Perfect Obedience

Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father in all things. He submitted to the Father's will, even to the point of death. This obedience wasn't learned in the sense that He didn't understand what obedience was, but in the sense that He learned to what extent God is to be obeyed, and He did it to the uttermost

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross... – **Philippians 2:8***

*Christ was by His sufferings taught how far God ought to be submitted to and obeyed.
– **John Calvin***

We fail in this all the time! We want to obey God when it is easy, but not when it is difficult.

The scene that the Writer is alluding to is of course the Garden scene where Jesus submits to the Father's will for His sufferings and death on the cross.

*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done. – **Luke 22:42***

This is the perfect display of tearful prayer and humble submission. Jesus's obedience to the hard things in life that God brings is our obedience to the hard things in life that God brings. We are united to Jesus' perfect obedience, and through this union we now have the enabling to live out that obedience in our own lives.

There is also the added idea that Jesus obeyed God during His life even as a child. He grew in wisdom, He grew in favor with the Father during His lifetime as He learned to humbly submit and obey the Father as the perfect human

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man...
– **Luke 2:52***

In Christ we have the enabling, by His Spirit dwelling in us, to also learn to obey God, to grow in wisdom and stature before God. In every stage of human growth and development we have different things which God uses to grow us, different capacities, different responsibilities, different competencies, etc...This most often happens through difficult and trying circumstances in our lives that God brings. What hard or difficult place might you be in today to learn obedience?

*God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without suffering.
– **Charles Spurgeon***

What was Jesus' resource for enduring in the face of temptation and trials?

Perseverance through Prayer

Jesus' resource for persevering in obedience and in suffering was prayer. Just like we took a look at last week that Jesus is the One we go to in prayer for all things, this is because He did it too! There are so many scenes of Jesus praying to the Father for help, for strength, for perseverance. Again, the immediate context that the Writer has in mind with this description is the suffering of Jesus in the Garden, with His tears and drops of blood, and His loud cries on the cross

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit! And having said this he breathed his last. – Luke 23:46

This is an important lesson for us in terms of growing in spiritual maturity because Jesus exemplified that when we face trying circumstances, we must seek the Lord more heartily and readily. We must not turn first to the world, or the wisdom of man, but we must seek the Lord's counsel first!

We can't always see what is coming our way, sometimes we can anticipate a large event in our lives and properly prepare for it:

The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. – Proverbs 27:12

Sometimes hardship is like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky, sometimes it is like the gathering storm clouds, ominous and dark....

There are lots of other ways that Jesus prays:

Solitude and Silence

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed... – Mark 1:35

Simplicity

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. – Matthew 6:5-8

Solicitation and Submission

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

– Matthew 6:9-13

Honoring God first in our prayers.

Bringing our needs and requests before Him.

Asking for reconciliation and forgiveness in relationship.

Submission to the Will of the Father.

Spiritual growth and maturity goes hand in hand with prayer. The depth and consistency of a Christian's prayer life is a direct correlation to the maturity of the Christian. A shallow and inconsistent prayer life will lead to slow growth, or even no growth at all. A deep and rich, consistent prayer life will always lead to greater spiritual maturity. What is your prayer life like right now? What is one way that God might be challenging you in your own prayer life?

Source of Salvation

The obedience of Jesus, the perseverance through prayer, both lead Jesus to be heard by God who delivered Him from death through His resurrection from the dead. This, of course, showed the power of God over life and death, it showed as well the perfection of the sacrifice that Jesus offered in His own body on our behalf. It was a way for God to say Well done, good and faithful servant It was accepted, and because it was accepted there is no need for anyone else to make atonement for sin, it was already done. We simply look to Jesus for the atonement He provides, and has become the source of our salvation!

There is no other source for salvation than in the Son of God. It cannot come from within us, because of our inbred, radical sin nature. It cannot be part God and part us as then we would still be contributing to our salvation in some way, and we know that we cannot. Thus, there is only one way to salvation and eternal life with God: by obeying Jesus Christ. What is it that we are called to obey?

This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. – John 6:29

The work of God is faith in the One whom He sent to redeem all the elect. This faith is not a work in the sense of earning salvation because I have faith, but is the free gift of God to His children to grasp on to the righteousness of Christ as our own. To let His blood cleanse us from all our sin, and to be restored in right relationship with the Father.

Those whom God effectually calls he also freely justifies. He does not pour righteousness into them but pardons their sins and looks on them and accepts them as if they were righteous— not because of anything worked in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. He does not consider their faith itself, the act of believing, as their righteousness or any other obedient response to the gospel on their part. Rather, he imputes to them the obedience and judicial satisfaction earned by Christ. For their part, they receive and rest on Christ and his righteousness by faith (and this faith is not their own but is itself a gift of God). – Westminster Catechism

Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the only means of justification. In the person justified, however, it is always accompanied by all the other saving graces and is not a dead faith, but works by love. – Westminster Catechism

Thus, what we see is that faith is not just a one time event leading to our justification (source of salvation), but is a continual life of faith, each day resting on Christ and trusting Him. This active faith will produce acts of love and good works; it is a living faith, and one which wants to grow.

This is the problem that the Writer turns his attention to address: the listeners had stopped growing and had become dull of hearing, to the point where they had barely moved past the basics of the faith at all!

Childish Faith

Hebrews 5:11–6:12] is a parenthetical thought which the Writer is using to give one of the strongest and longest warnings and exhortations that exists in the NT. There is strong language used to warn the church about falling away from the faith, and of becoming dull to listen and heed God's voice in their lives. He rebukes them for their spiritual immaturity, saying that they still needed spiritual milk, and not the solid meat of the mature believer. This is a theme which both Peter and Paul use in their own letters to the churches. It is a scathing rebuke to the church that they are remaining in spiritual infancy.

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh... – 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

There are three things which is connected to this idea of spiritual immaturity, or spiritual infancy, that we will quickly look at. I think that this also describes, sadly, the general state of the Christian Church in America today. Very few Christians know even the most basic of foundational principles of our faith, yet seek to be seen as mature, when in fact they are still spiritual babies.

Dull of Hearing

The problem of the listeners was not the subject matter being too difficult, although it may have been, but in the listeners themselves. They had become slow to hear the Word of God and apply it to their lives.

Perhaps it was the love of the world, or the trials they were facing in the church, but something made them become lazy in their attention to the things of God. They had allowed their ears to become slow in hearing Christ. This is the basic problem, they were not paying attention to God's Word. They were lazy, they were complacent, they felt that they had already attained a spiritual maturity, when in fact they were just getting started.

What are you paying attention to in your life? What is getting your thoughts? What is capturing your moments in between busyness? Social media? Texts? Politics? If God and His Word is not capturing your attention, if other things start to crowd in and grab it, then you will become lazy, slothful, complacent in listening to God. You will start to not even be able to hear Him again, but will lose His voice! This is a scary place to be because the danger is that we can wander off into bad places.

Ignorant

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

The amount of time that they had been believers, or the background from which they came, either one meant that they ought to have been able to be teachers of God's ways and His Word. This isn't implying that they were all teaching pastors, but that they had sufficient knowledge and training to be able to pass on the gospel and purposes of God to others. Yet, because of their dull hearing and complacency, they had only a rudimentary knowledge of God, to the point where they couldn't even teach one another or others! It is a sad commentary on the spiritual maturity of the church that they couldn't pass on their faith because they were so ignorant of what it actually was!

what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. – 2 Timothy 2:2

The reality is that we are all informing others about God by how we act, how we talk, and how we structure our lives. The question comes up: what kind of God are we informing others about? The more that we get to know the God of the Bible, the more that our lives will reflect Him to others. What we want to do, our goal, is to teach others about the true and living God. To continue to grow in knowledge of Him, which is both informational, as well as experiential.

Unskilled

You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The third rebuke is that they were unskilled in God's Word, that they were inexperienced in the Scriptures. Notice, again, that the issue is not just informational knowledge, but in experience through application. It is one thing to know how to tie a fishing line, to know which bait to use for which fish, which technique to use, etc.. it is another thing entirely to actually go and catch some fish. This is the rebuke that the Writer gives to the people: they were not actually applying God's Word to their lives so that they could discern what is good from what is bad; from what pleases God to what is displeasing to Him. It is the topic of love in action. What is it that we are called on to grow in? To love the things that God loves, and to love the way that He loves.

Bernard of Clarivoux has written extensively about this over the course of this life. He gives four stages of love, which each stage being a progressively more mature stage:

The first degree of love is when man loves himself for his own sake. Bernard argues that this is the natural starting place for all mankind. We are created to love ourselves, but it is better to share that love with our neighbors

The second degree love is when man loves God for his own good. This is part of wisdom, when a person recognizes that they need help from God and seek Him out in order to get His help. God's love is already at work drawing the person to Him, yet the love the person has for God at this stage is still self-seeking, rather than seeking God for His own sake.

The third degree of love is when man loves God for God's sake. Bernard makes the transition to this degree of love this way, Man's frequent needs make it necessary for him to call upon God often, and to taste by frequent contact, and to discover by tasting how sweet the Lord is. It is in this way that the taste of His own sweetness leads us to love God in purity more than our need alone would prompt us to do.

The fourth degree of love is when man loves himself for God's sake.

When we grow in practicing loving what God loves, including ourselves, we will grow in spiritual maturation.

The writer isn't saying that milk is bad, only that it has a place in our lives to strengthen us for when we can eat solid food. We cannot sustain ourselves on milk alone, our bodies need more and better food. Milk is the best thing for a baby, but isn't sustainable for grown ups. As Christians, we must be consistently seeking to grow in our knowledge of God and our love of God. Only in this way can we ever seek to grow. Spirituality is never stagnant; we are either growing or going backwards. Which are you?

Continual Progress

The positive exhortation that the Writer pivots to is the exhortation to pressing on to maturity, which means moving forward past the foundational teachings of the faith. The way that the writer gives those foundational teachings has the feel and rhythm of an early church confession, which we have seen before, is necessary to distinguish what the Church believes and holds as true. The Writer is once again helping the Church to remember what those foundational truths are so they can move forward to more difficult, more complex, truths of God. The six statements come in the form of three pairs, which taken together are the foundational doctrines of the Christian church.

Soteriology

Repentance + Faith

Repent of our sin and trust God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Pneumatology

Baptism + Empowerment

Get baptized in the name of Jesus. We must be baptized in Jesus, meaning, we must trust and look to Jesus' baptism of His death and resurrection on our behalf. John's baptism was simply a repentance from sin, but Jesus was not in it. The baptism of Jesus is trusting in His baptism of death and resurrection.

Special designation of the Apostles sign of their authority as Christ's representatives. Main idea is submitting to the authority and teaching of the Apostles, primarily through the written Scriptures.

The reception of the Holy Spirit is not conferred only through the laying on of hands, but in receiving the gift of salvation by faith alone through the finished work of Christ alone.

Eschatology

Resurrection + Judgement

Resurrection of the dead: The truth that just as Jesus was raised from the dead as the first fruits of the promised resurrection, so too, we will also be given resurrected bodies at the revelation of Jesus at His second coming.

Eternal judgement: There is a final and eternal accounting for all things by God at the end of all things. For those of us in Christ, we are pardoned and will sit in judgement over those who have not believed in Jesus. We all have an eternal destiny, some for eternal destruction, some for eternal life.

These foundations are necessary to progress further into the deeper truths of God.

Example of learning the basics of music as a musician. Don't perform scales, but scales are necessary for performance. Greatest clarinet player on the planet started each day with the basics before moving on to the hard stuff.

Formations

In our text, the Writer doesn't yet get in to the deeper, more complex truths of God. He ends with a statement: And this we will do if God permits.

Of course God permits us to continue on in spiritual maturity, so how has He permitted it? What are the means of grace by which we grow in spiritual maturity?

INNER FORMATION	OUTWARD FORMATION	CORPORATE FORMATION
This focuses on the inner spiritual life of the Christian. Involves spiritual habits to form and transform us from the inside out:	This focuses on the call to live out the outward implications of inner spiritual growth:	This focuses on the corporate habits which help to form a community of faith:
<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Acts of mercy</i>	<i>Confession</i>
<i>Scripture Reading</i>	<i>Solitude</i>	<i>Worship</i>
<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Preaching of God's Word</i>
<i>Silence</i>	<i>Rest/Sabbath</i>	<i>Lord's Supper</i>
<i>Fasting</i>	<i>Tithing</i>	<i>Fellowship</i>

The words that the Writer uses to refer to progressing: leave, go on, we will do.

Spiritual maturity is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the great sanctifier of our souls, yet it also takes work on our part, to participate in the sanctification process that He has begun in all of His children. The invitation for us is: will you lean in to the work that God is doing to mature you, or will you be complacent and dull of hearing?

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? – Psalm 11:3

This is a sobering reminder that we all need to have the foundations of our faith set firmly so that we can progress on to spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is what brings health to our bodies/souls, our relationships, our churches. I desire for us as a church to be spiritually mature so that we can be spiritually healthy so that we are move effective in witnessing the message and power of the gospel to a city which is desperately sick, which is spiritually dead or spiritually infants, and which needs the living presence of the Spirit of God which brings life, hope, joy, peace, and love.