

# It's Time to Grow Up

*Hebrews*

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Amen to that. Let me invite you to open your Bibles, please, to the book of Hebrews chapter five, please.

Grim determination. These are the words my wife used to describe my facial expression while changing diapers. We have been through all of the various stages of early child growth and development. And it seemed to be in our rear view mirror. However, my wife told me the other day on her way to Louisville that she is looking forward to my facial expression of grim determination again.

You know, those of us who have had children have rejoiced at the various stages of their development. We rejoice at the first few... I know this sounds weird, but we rejoice at the first few bowel movements. I don't know about you, but we actually made a chart. They call it the void chart, just to make it kind of clean it up a little bit where there is the wet voids and the other voids. Nonetheless, we look forward to seeing them progress even at those early stages, but the void chart gets old.

We make a big deal when they transition from unable to sit up to sitting up, to scooting around, to crawling around to finally walking which really ... which child ever starts with walking. They start with the running, right? They just like kind of... they are always barreling forward somewhere. We look for, we enjoy all of this development. It is an encouragement and a joy to us.

We enjoy watching their food developments from formula or mommy's milk to rice cereal to the different grain cereals that we try to feed them. And then finally we get very happy when we can just start feeding them off of our plates. It is much easier, isn't it, and not have to mix stuff in. No, just kid of cut some things off. Put it on their plate. They throw it all over the place. It is a beautiful thing.

Our favorite transition, of course, is getting them out of diapers. No one wants to have the kid with ... that is three and still in diapers, right? No one wants that happening. You know, we have the pull ups at night. That is another story altogether. But, you know, we don't want to be dealing with diapers at three years old, so we really... we get very excited when they are done with diapers financially, experientially, all of it.

We expect them to grow up. It is part of the process. And so it is in the spiritual lives of people. That development must take place. We can't have diapers on adult Christians. We can't still have to feed them formula. There must be maturity. And this passage calls the believer in Jesus Christ to a constant pursuit of spiritual maturity. We cannot be retarded in our growth. We cannot have that growth process slow down. It must progress. And the congregation that is being addressed here in the book of Hebrews and, by implication, the way that we have to respond to it is that there are some in the congregation or, in fact, the congregation at large in this context here of Hebrews chapter five is not progressing properly in their Christian life. They have been retarded in their growth.

They certainly had demonstrated their faith as an entity, as a body. There is now question that they had expressed their faith. They had demonstrated their faith. The book totally attests to the fact that the people in that congregation at large as an entity that group of people had trusted Jesus Christ and it had made an impact on their lives. The author addresses them as holy brethren in chapter three and verse one. He tells them in the passage we are going not be considering that this time they should be teachers. He tells them in chapter six in verse nine that he is confident of better things concerning them. He tells them in chapter 10 and verse 10 that they have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. He was confident of their collective salvation, not necessarily their individual salvation. They had come to draw near in a new and a living way. This is a group of believers.

In chapter 10 verses 32 through 34 he reminds them of the evidence of their salvation at an earlier time in their Christian experience when they had endured a great conflict of their faith. It says in chapter 10 verses 32 and following:

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

He stated very clearly at the end of chapter 10's warning passage.

“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”<sup>2</sup>

He was confident of the group. But, brothers and sisters, do not fool yourself into thinking he did not have questions about some of them. He brought them to the carpet time and again in this incredible letter, that while they had a profession of faith their possession of faith was certainly in question. He warns them in chapter two. He warns them in chapters three and four. He warns them in chapters five and six. He warns them

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:32-34.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:39.

in chapter 10 and he warns them again in chapter 12. And the vivid descriptive powerful language he uses is not simply of you poor Christian who is not simply going to get all the rewards that he wishes he would gain. It is far stronger than to expect that every single person that was under the hearing of these preached messages and this recorded sermons that they were all 100 percent in Christ. As a group, yes. Everyone I do not believe so. Note these passages in Hebrews 2:3:

“...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”<sup>3</sup>

This comes on the heels of saying when the Old Testament law was conveyed every disobedience came with a just recompense of rewards. How shall we escape who have seen Christ?

He brings them to the net in Hebrews three verses 12 and 14:

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God... For we have become partakers of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

He doesn't stop. If he just stopped there we would be able to say, “So everyone in this assembly that he is talking to are all believers.” But he doesn't stop. We are partakers of Christ. He says:

“...we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”<sup>5</sup>

He continues to warn them in chapter four and verse one where he says:

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 10 verses 38 and 39.

“But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition.”<sup>7</sup>

Those who fall back, what are they falling back unto? Perdition. This is not something we can massage the language. A person who heads back and says, “No, that Christianity thing is not for me. No, Jesus is not enough. Yes, this is my life. This is what I where I want to invest my life. This is where I want to spend my time. This is what is important to me.” That person is one who has drawn back to perdition.

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 2:3.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 3:12, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 3:14.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:38-39.

And the preacher and the writer is making sure that they understand just because you are amongst a group of people that do know Jesus Christ as their Savior, just because you are attached doesn't make you part. He says in chapter 12, if you want to look there for just a moment, chapter 12 beginning in verse 12 he writes. I keep saying preacher because these are most likely sermons that were preached. It is also recorded for us. So I can say preached. I can say wrote. It is the same thing. These have come forth for us.

In verse 12 of chapter 12:

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.<sup>8</sup>

Now remember this. He is not talking to an individual. He is talking to a body and likely what he is saying here is, "Listen. There are people that are associated with this group that are dislocating and what we need to do is make sure they know where to go, because otherwise they are just going to defect and head back to Judaism because it is a safe haven for them. The Jews at that time were not being persecuted while the Christians were. And so it was a much easier scenario to head back to Judaism. It is comfortable and comforting and he is telling the church at large: Make sure that there is not anyone among you that is going to dislocate themselves. Strengthen the hands that hang down. Strengthen the feeble needs. Bring them along. He says in verse 14:

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God."<sup>9</sup>

Listen. That is not spiritual growth being spoken of here. Falling short of the grace of God is falling short of salvation.

...lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.<sup>10</sup>

Those are tough passages, ladies and gentleman.

While the body at large he was affirming their salvation and we will note that in the process of looking through this section. He was not saying there is no one among you that is in perilous danger. And so it will be with us today here, ladies and gentlemen. We can take great comfort in the Scriptures and you may be one who has been retarded in your growth and you will be able to cling to some of this because you will turn and head

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 12:14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 12:15-17.

in the right direction and there may be others among us who will hear this and reject it and keep on the same pathway of neglect and selfishness and materialism and meism. And do you know what we are going not note from that? That is clear indication that one has come nigh unto the gospel and turned and hightailed it in another direction.

We must look at his passage. And, you know, as we look through it I know there will be some who will agree with what I say. There will be some who will disagree with how I interpret certain elements, but what you can't do is because of your disagreement with how we treat nuances in this text not get the message. The message is strong and the message is sure and the message is: Don't turn back. The message is: It is time to grow up. The message is: We can't go continuing on in spiritual laziness or spiritual dullness. It is not becoming of a believer in Jesus Christ. He gives them motivation throughout the entire book of why they shouldn't turn back and why they should charge forward in Jesus Christ. He tells them that Jesus Christ is better than Old Testament prophets. He tells them that Jesus Christ in his divinity is better than the angels. He tells us that Jesus Christ in his humanity is better than the angels. He tells us that Jesus Christ is better than Moses. He tells us that Jesus Christ is better than Joshua. He tells us that Jesus Christ is better than the Aaronic priesthood. And he tells us that he is better than the Melchizedekian priesthood, because he is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

He is the very best. Why would you go anywhere else? Why would you head back to Judaism? Why would you turn your back from Jesus Christ? He is the best. His sacrifice, his ministry, the covenant whereupon his ministry is based is all better. His sacrifice is better. It has better results and it has a finality to it. There is no where else to turn. Why? Why would these people settle for less? Why would we settle for less?

This text that we are considering this morning will help us to answer why this group was struggling, why they were considering accepting second best and why today we see sometimes people who profess faith in Christ that just kind of flounder and waffle and make no progress. This passage is very applicable. The problem to start out with is this people have become dull of hearing.

Look, please, with me, at chapter five and verse 11. He has just told them about Jesus Christ's superiority to the Aaronic priesthood, the Levitical priesthood. And he is starting to turn his attention to the Melchizedekian priesthood, Jesus Christ's superiority to that even because he is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek. But then he says in verse 11:

“...of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”<sup>11</sup>

Not because it is hard to explain, though it is deep, not because it is so out there that the spiritual minded person can't gather it. The problem is it was hard to explain because the church at large had become dull of hearing and the word there dull it can be translated various ways, lazy, sluggish and my favorite, dimwitted. Everyone loves to be called a

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<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 5:11.

dimwit. But, you know, friends, when we don't grow it is not because of God's inability. It is not because of the insufficiency of God's grace. It is because I am dimwitted and I am sluggish and I am lazy. And so the author of Hebrews is telling them in this section it is time to grow up. And our focus will be on growing up. But it is going to be a preventative maintenance type of a situation. It is a prescription from a spiritual doctor and that prescription is five actions that will prevent or help to prevent spiritual dullness.

The first action that we want to note, that will help us to avoid spiritual dullness is that we must practice the truth. We must practice the truth. He starts this whole little subsection off from verse 11 through 14 with the statement that they have become dull of hearing. Laziness retards progress in all parts of our lives.

Now bear with me, please. I like sports illustrations, because they are the ones that come to my mind. Sorry about that. Do any of you remember Sean Kemp? Raise your hand if you remember Sean Kemp. Not many of you. What I can tell you about Sean Kemp is he was a slender, tall athletic, lightning quick, ferocious basketball player. He was a high flying dunker and he was one of those guys that every time someone tried to shoot he was the one that was making it so they were so intimidated because they knew that their shot was going to get rejected into the crowd. He was just dynamic in his absolute athleticism. And the NBA lockout happened. And on the other side of the NBA lockout Sean Kemp looked kind of like this.

I don't know if you can see that. I don't know if that resonates with you. You go from a slender athletic, very fast athlete to someone who really became sluggish. Instead of looking like Sean Kemp—now this also dates me a little bit—he looked more like Charles Barkley. Anyone remember Charles Barkley? His nickname was the round mound of rebound. Well, here is Sean Kemp. He has turned into the round mound of rebound taller and wider. Why? He didn't have the rigors of the NBA season to keep his body under subjection. He became sluggish and lazy.

Well, the Bible gives us numerous warnings about physical laziness, particularly in the book of Proverbs. But the Bible also warns us about spiritual laziness and that is far more part of our discussion and our consideration.

Now do you feel as though you look like that spiritually? Most people are going to say no. I don't think I look that bad spiritually.

I want to give you a few hooks, a few thoughts that might help us from the text and from our considerations that might help us to actually answer whether I have become spiritually lazy or dull of hearing.

Doctrinal delay. This passage talks about the fact that these things were hard to explain. They have come to need milk in verse 12. There was a doctrinal delay. They weren't ferocious for truth any longer. And I wonder. I wonder if that describes many in Christianity today who call themselves Christians that don't bore me with all the teaching part. Don't teach me deep theology. Don't be so oriented to the text. Tell me some

stories about Sean Kemp and Charles Barkley. It will really liven things up. Keep the message brief. Cut it down. Don't speak longer than 20 minutes. You can get it done in 20 minutes. That will be fine.

That is Christianity light. That is the Christianity of today. Doctrinal delay. Do not overwhelm me with truth. You certainly aren't going to preach for 50 minutes, are you? I have to eat lunch, don't you know?

Really? Well, so do I. We all have to eat lunch, but, you know, lunch can wait. Food comes for most of us at least three times a day. Some of us more, some of us less. Whatever. But we all eat. So we all ... do we all eat spiritually? Do we really have to trim everything out?

Say, "I went to church on Sunday morning. I don't need Sunday school. I will go at 11. That is fine. This is plenty. I don't need the 9:30 hour. That is for the kids. I don't need to come back at night. You know, at night, you know, some people come. Those are the real traditionalists. They think Sunday night services are still supposed to be there. You know, I, on the other hand, think that we shouldn't have Sunday night service because, you know, whatever."

Wednesday night comes around. "Well, you know, I have been busy. I am tired. You know, they are just going to talk, you know, more about things I already know."

Doctrinal delay. That is one prescription or one symptom of spiritual dullness. Here is a second symptom, discipleship defunct or discipleship defunction, but there disciple defunct. What do I mean here? For the time you want to be teachers. For the amount of time you have been saved you should be telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ, showing them who he is and what he has done and what he has accomplished and what he can do in their lives. You should be telling others the gospel. But you should also be ministering to other believers and bringing them along. You should be teachers. There is no excuse, ladies and gentleman, if you have been saved for a year. You should be giving it out in the church, out of the church, wherever you go. It is time to communicate truth. But a spiritually lazy person is discipleship defunct.

And they also have a discernment dilemma. Look at the end of verse 14.

"...have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."<sup>12</sup>

That is the character trait of the one who can receive solid food. That is the one who is maturing in Christ. That is the one who is able to take the new doctrine. They are able to discern good and evil. Well, just take it the opposite way. A person who is spiritually lazy isn't able to discern good and evil. So they have a discernment dilemma.

Doctrinal discernment, but not just doctrinal discernment, morality discernment. You know, ladies and gentlemen, it is much easier to—I am going not use a word I hate—

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<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 5:14.

quote, unquote, fall into sin. No one falls, by the way. They dive right in. But fall into sin. It is easier to fall into sin when we have not been wrestling with the truth and knowing the truth and imbibing the truth and embracing the truth and loving the truth and living the truth. It is so much easier to fall into sin or dive into sin. There is a discernment dilemma. And there is a disciple distortion. We could say they are not obeying. They are not practicing.

Look at what it says in verse 13 of chapter five.

“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness.”<sup>13</sup>

That is one way to read that word righteousness part. Unskillful in the word which demands righteousness and produces righteousness, that declares righteousness. They are unskillful in that word of righteousness,

“...for he is a babe. 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.”<sup>14</sup>

And so as we look at this group that is being spoken of here, they have got some kind of a problem with they don't endure sound doctrine. They have got a problem when they don't convey or teach sound doctrine. They don't really grapple with sound doctrine that produces a right application of truth in their lives. And this is a group of people that just ... they just don't practice the truth. And so they have become dull of hearing. They are lazy spiritually. They are slovenly. And then they are not able to receive.

Knowing the truth is good. But it is insufficient. It is insufficient for true spiritual growth to take place. That is why, ladies and gentleman, in addition to declarations of New Testament truth there are also applications of New Testament truth. Just remember the book of Ephesians. I love it. It is my favorite because it is so well designed to just put this in front of our faces. In Ephesians 5:18 you have the command to be filled with the Spirit. Then he tells you what the results of the Spirit look like in verses 19, 20 and 21: singing, thanking, submitting, speaking to one another, all those outflows of being filled with the Spirit. And then from verse 22 through chapter six and verse nine, at the very least, he has this application section. A Spirit filled wife will do these things. A Spirit filled husband will do these things. A Spirit filled child will do these things. A Spirit filled father will do these things. A Spirit filled employee will do these things. A Spirit filled employer will do these things. They are tests.

Here is the demand. Be filled with the Spirit. Here is what it looks like. He doesn't just say, “Hey, do this abstract thing.” He says, “This is what you are to do and this is how it will look.”

See, learning truth is not enough. It is learning and applying. It is learning and living. Paul told us that knowledge puffs up. But love edifies. Knowledge puffs up. The time

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<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 5:13.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 5:13-14.



that had elapsed since conversion of these believers was sufficient for this congregation that they should have been teaching, but, instead, they needed to go back to their ABCs. They needed to go back to the basics. They hadn't grown up. The reason for their maturity delay was a lack of practicing the truth. Learning the truth is to be coupled with application of the truth. It is just the bottom line. God's Word is constant in this regard. After Jesus gave three chapters worth of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount he concluded by saying this.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.<sup>15</sup>

James said:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.<sup>16</sup>

Don't just hear. It is hear and ask God for his grace to do and be part of the process of the doing.

In James chapter three and verse 13:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

Maturity is displayed by applying the truth. And this congregation spoken of here in this text they were not applying the truth. They were not displaying maturity. They were spiritually sluggish, lazy and dull. And their dullness was impeding their progress.

As we practice the truth our minds are trained to have discretion. As we practice what we learn we are able to then put to use the truth for learning more so. This lessens our spiritual dullness. It begins to display maturity. And this preacher is seeking to help the congregation further eliminate their dullness and develop their maturity as he transitions into chapter six and verse one. The same context, nothing has changed. We are still talking about the same thing. We have a chapter division in it. Sometimes distorts our perspective. He is continuing on the same pathway. Develop your maturity. Rather than remaining stagnant or even regressing, he encourages them to progress in the truth, not just practice the truth, practice the truth is good, but it opens the doorway to where we can progress in the truth and he says this beginning in verse one.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 7:26-27.

<sup>16</sup> James 1:22-24.

<sup>17</sup> James 3:13.

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, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.<sup>18</sup>

As you look at just learning in general it is important not to be stuck in elementary school forever, right? Our children learn numbers hopefully and then they learn addition and subtraction. And then we add onto that foundation multiplication and division and when they have mastered those concepts we move them on to algebraic equations and formulas and then we hope that they will be able to then do and work in applied sciences where they will be able to utilize formulas for, say, architecture, manufacturing, mechanical engineering or some type of engineering. There are all kinds of venues whereby we employ what we are learning on a foundational level. But engineers, they don't get really good at their trade and at math by continuing to go through the numbers, one and two and three. Oh, I can count by my fives now and five and 10 and 15. I can do by 20s, 20, 40, 60. I can do by hundreds, 100, 200. That is now how they get good at it. They move beyond it. They learn the numbers. They learn addition. They learn subtraction, multiplication, division and they progress from there. And then they are able to employ all those foundational tools into the equations and formulas that they learned so that then they are able to calculate the span of something. They are able to calculate what the proper angle should be for this structure so that it will be structurally sound. But they don't get better, because they just keep going back to the ABCs again and that is what the author here says.

You have need to go back to milk, but that is not where we are going, ladies and gentlemen, because I don't want you to stay as a baby. What we are going to do instead is we are going to leave behind the elementary things and you really need to recognize that the elementary things for interpretive sake, we can talk about the elementary things being Jewish things, Judaistic things, the very good interpretation of that is don't go back to Judaism, because those laid the foundation for the arrival of Jesus Christ. Or we can even talk about the elementary things of the faith such as well we are saved by faith. That is good and we have to constantly remind ourselves about that, but there is more than that in the Christian life than recognizing that simple reality. We then move on to well we grow by faith and we grow by grace and we grow by depending upon God. And we go beyond the foundational.

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection.”<sup>19</sup>

Now some have interpreted, many, actually, have interpreted, the word perfection as a full participation in salvation. I think that interpretation is lacking personally. It is not the general way that maturity or perfection is utilized in our New Testament. I will just

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 6:1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 6:1.

share a few samples of how this concept of perfection is employed throughout the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 14:20:

“Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.”<sup>20</sup>

There is an implication there of growth, right? Come to full understanding. Don’t be like a baby.

In Philippians 3:15:

“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”<sup>21</sup>

Those who are maturing spiritually.

In Colossians 4:12 Epaphras’ prayer is like this.

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”<sup>22</sup>

The concept here is this growth in maturity unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

James says in James 1:4:

“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”<sup>23</sup>

The trials we face are a maturing agent for us. And so here in Hebrews I believe we have the same concept. Our view of how he uses perfection here in Hebrews 6:1 should be impacted by how it is utilized elsewhere. And so he is telling them to grow up. He is telling them to man up. Stop feasting on mommy’s milk. Stop drinking formula. You need more than rice cereal in here. You need to progress so real meat.

And, you know, one of the ways that we can recognize that he definitely does this is as you look he is in the midst of a discussion in chapter five of the superiority of Jesus Christ in Aaronic priesthood. And then he starts to talk about Melchizedek and says, “But you are not ready for this.” And then from chapter 5:11 through chapter six verse 20

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:20.

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 3:15.

<sup>22</sup> Colossians 4:12.

<sup>23</sup> James 1:4.

he goes on to tell them, “You are lacking here.” And in chapter seven verse one he says, “And so now about Melchizedek.”

Did they grow up in between 5:10 and 7:1? Well, they very well could have because they could have said, “Yeah, I have really been stagnant. I have really been following... I was really considering going back, but really I need to head forward. I need more of Christ, not less of him.”

And so he calls them to a maturity in their understanding of Christ. In what ways, ladies and gentlemen, in what ways do you display a desire to progress in your understanding of truth? You really need to think. I can't think for you. Do you take advantage of the teaching offered to you hear? Every time we are in here there is the word that is coming forth. That is our emphasis, the words. How often do you take advantage of what is being offered to you? Do you take advantage of the devotional readings sent home each week to prepare you for Sunday school? Do you make provision for your family to get up in time to take advantage of Sunday school? These are ways you can ask yourself: Do I want to progress? Do I want to mature? Oh, Sunday school is for the kids. No, it is not. No, it is time to grow up for all of us. We all need that spiritual nourishment. And we can know whether we are languishing, stagnating, regressing, based upon decisions that we make with regard to our ... the truth. The author of Hebrews does not leave them in their stagnant condition, but he implores them towards maturity by challenging them to practice the truth and progress in the truth and then he transitions in this same section he gives us something that if we... since we are not Greek speakers and because we don't have necessarily a translation that reflects very carefully what is going on here, we are missing something that is deeply rooted in this text. In that this is not a self help section of the book of Hebrews. This is not a pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of section in the book of Hebrews. This is a charge to spiritual dependency. He gives us an emphasis here on God's sovereign grace and we don't even recognize it in our English Bibles, because as he tells us to go on, he says, “Let us go one to perfection.” He uses a Greek term φερωμεθα (ferometha) and the concept there is one of bringing. You look at all through the New Testament where φερωμεθα (ferometha) or φερω (fero) is being utilized and most regularly it is translated brought or brig. And in this usage it is a passive voice, meaning I am not the source of this maturity.

Let us be brought unto maturity. This is a very important element, ladies and gentlemen, because we are not going to practice the truth and we are not going to progress in the truth unless we first permit God's work of maturity to take place in our lives. Like salvation, spiritual maturity is a divine work. He says, “Let us be brought unto maturity.”

So what is this a call to? Since I can't do it, how do I deal with this? I look at a text and it is now... we look at it and it is God's responsibility. What do I do? It is the same thing as what you do of salvation. You trust. And you place yourself in his care. Salvation is not simply believe and be saved. Salvation is an exchange. I will give you my life, you give me yours. It is life for life. I will take your sin debt. I will give you my righteousness. It is not oh, yeah. Jesus paid it all and I don't owe him anything. That is how most professing Christians live their lives. Jesus paid it all. And don't you tell me he didn't.

But just don't tell me he has any claims on my life.

Friends, if you have any inkling of feeling that way, it is time to really understand salvation and come to Jesus Christ as your Savior today, because that salvation is damnation. You have got to be very careful that you do not take the whole counsel of God and you just look at slivers of it in packets and say, "Oh, yes, my theology is sound. I... Jesus does everything." And he does. "And I do nothing." That is not true. He does everything with regard to bringing us spiritually. He just says, "Give me yourself and I will do the rest. I will take care of it because you can't make yourself right. You can't even make yourself mature. I will do that. Give me your life."

Let us be brought to maturity.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter five verses 23 and 24 this concept comes to the forefront very clearly. It says:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.<sup>24</sup>

Who is making us right? He is. Not me. Not self helps. Not self works. It is not my own religious endeavors. It is all about him doing the work, but I have to place myself in his hands so he can. We need to permit God's work of maturity. And if you don't, you will remain as a spiritual babe. Or I might say more accurately, remain in your sins.

It is not a good place to be. Jesus paid it all. It is applied to the one who embraces him the way that God's Word tells us to embrace him. Your sins will be removed and his righteousness will be added when you exchange your life for his, when you leave all and follow him, when you turn from yourself and your own ways and your own desires and turn to him as the Thessalonians have done, when you do what Paul told the people at the... on Mars Hill that God commands everyone everywhere to repent, to turn from self and turn to him. That this when we are in Christ.

Are you progressing in your spiritual life? Is there a sense that you are not making progress? If you are not making progress this may very well be your biggest problem here. You have not placed yourself in God's hands that he might do with you what he desires. You can't live the Christian life without God's power. A life lived in dependence upon God's Spirit is a life that is fruitful in attitude, in actions. There is fruit, fruit of the Spirit.

Practicing the truth, progressing in the truth, depending upon God's enabling grace are all elements needed to avoid spiritual dullness and the passage is not done yet. He is really going to give us something to think about.

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

The writer and preacher warns the reader that, fourthly, we must perceive the dangers of retreating. This is a tough passage, ladies and gentlemen and it is variously interpreted and it is hard, because the preacher here under the inspiration of the Spirit he pins us in a corner in two untenable ways. He puts the screws to us by the way he talks that makes us say, “Those two things can’t be true.”

And people have mutilated this passage because of the tension that is involved in verses four through six. Let’s read the verses and then I want to present four views very quickly. I am going to leave them on the screen and then I want to talk you through it a little bit.

Verse four of Hebrews six. He says:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.<sup>25</sup>

Here you go. Here are four views on it and I will try to come to a ... the best I can. Dogmatism at this point is foolish. You want to be dogmatic about this passage? Have at it. I will not be.

Some believe that this passage refers to people who have genuinely experienced salvation and have subsequently defected and lost their salvation. Secondly, some believe that this passage refers to people who have come very near unto salvation, but not all the way. They will never come because of their defection from Christ. Number three. Some believe that this passage refers to people who have genuinely experienced salvation, have defected, will not be restored to full fellowship and have lost eternal rewards. Some believe that this passage is a hypothetical scenario which simply illustrates the severity of defecting from the faith.

All right. Let’s talk through it quickly. I have left it on the board here because it is the only way to really talk through this. The first one is very easy to dismiss. It has no theological consideration. It does not incorporate the fullness of God’s Word in the least. It doesn’t even incorporate the fullness of the New Testament. So it is easily dismissed, because when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, God places the Spirit in them until the day of redemption, Ephesians 1:13-14, Ephesians 4:30 and that we are kept for the power of God through faith until salvation ready to be revealed at the last time, 1 Peter chapter one verse five. We could go on and on with why this is inaccurate. Dismiss it.

The last three are more a little more challenging. View number three here you see on the board. Some believe it is real believers. They were just simply losing rewards. I cannot ... I have in the past interpreted it that way. I cannot hold to that. The wording is far too harsh. Even the illustration used is coming out of verse six and verses seven and eight he talks about people being ripped up and thrown in the fire. And we do all kinds of stuff

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<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6.

with trying to make that work with John chapter 15 and we do all kinds of cartwheels trying to make that stick, because we are uncomfortable with the passage and I just... I don't think you can make that argument strongly enough to assuage the arguments. I have to set aside view number three that these are real believers that just lost eternal rewards. It is too strong of a warning.

Where we run into problems is when you look at view number two, they come very near to salvation, just not all the way. The words that are used in this passage just make that hard to say they didn't come all the way, because he says you have been enlightened. That word is used later in the book to talk about their salvation experience. You have tasted. That is not like a little nibble. That is a full participation of the heavenly gifts. You have partaken... been partakers of the Holy Spirit. This is really hard to say this is not a believer with the wording that is used here. And so it is very difficult. The fourth one being a hypothetical, that is kind of hard because, well, what good does a hypothetical warning do anyway? No, let's look through it a little bit with some detail. Look at verse 11 of chapter five, back to chapter five and verse 11. It says:

...of whom we have much to say, and 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 first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.<sup>26</sup>

He is making an emphasis of that pronoun you.

Chapter six and verse one.

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection.”<sup>27</sup>

Look down at verse three.

“And this we will do if God permits.”<sup>28</sup>

Look at chapter six and verse nine:

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. 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.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 5:11-12.

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 6:1.

<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 6:3.

<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 6:9-10.

And he goes on. He is using these very personal words. Now when you look at the beginning of verse four now, chapter six and verse four.

“For it is impossible for those...”<sup>30</sup>

He has been saying you and we, us and he goes back to you, we and us. But here he says those. Look at verse six.

“...if they fall away...”<sup>31</sup>

So he has made a little bit of a shift for us from you and we and us to those and they. Is it possible that they knew a group of people that had at one point been a part of what is going on there and they saw all that was going on, they saw the reality of Christ and they were part of the group and they have already defected, they have already fallen. And the reason I can also include that is because the word if at the beginning of verse six is not in the text. Some of you have a different translation. You probably already know that. If is not there. There is no if in this text. It really should be translated, “And have fallen away,” past tense.

These people have already left. Here you are, spiritual babes. Here you are. You should be teachers. Here you are in desperate need of maturity. Here you are. Let me point you to some who were among you—I am theorizing here. I am not dogmatizing—they have already fallen away. They are not coming back, because the participation they had was not real. They looked like they imbibed it. They seemed like they were part of it. It... they may have even done things that look Spirit empowered. Have we not seen that before? Oh, yes, we have. Listen to the words of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.<sup>32</sup>

And he goes away because it wasn't a full participation. And Jesus said in chapter seven of the same book, Matthew.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 6:4.

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 6:6.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 13:20.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 7:21-23.



Did Judas perform miracles or not? He did. I don't know how. I don't know why. I don't know the answers. I can't give you all the exhaustible way it worked, but Judas somehow participated with the Spirit and he did not embrace salvation. He did not receive eternal life. He resides for 2000 years in hell because of his inability or unwillingness to come to Jesus Christ fully and participate with him, but he sure looked like it for three years, walking with Jesus and talking with Jesus and observing Jesus and this group of people.

They had people come among them and they seemed to participate in salvation. From their perspective they were believers, but they caved in under the tremendous pressure of persecution, because it was safe. I wonder what would happen in this assembly... I will state it differently. I wonder what will happen when this assembly experiences real religious persecution. It is coming, ladies and gentlemen. Do not fool yourself. It is coming. Open your eyes to what is happening. It is coming. Where are you going to stand?

They are not persecuting the Roman Catholic Church. They are not persecuting the churches that homosexual wedding, whatever. Not a big deal. It is all right. You guys are all just so legalistic to not let two men get married. The infallacy or infallibility of Scripture? Come on. It has been proven that the Scriptures have errors in it.

You heard that, right? Please make me a list of these errors. I would like to see them, because they are bull.

They are not going to attack churches that won't hold to the truth. They are going to attack churches that hold to the truth, that stand for righteousness and truth. What is going to happen to you? It will be easier to go somewhere else.

And to depart from biblical Christianity based upon escaping religious persecution is evidence of no salvation at all. Might there have been among others ...been among them others in the congregation who sat in the same perilous seat, might there be some in this congregation who sit in the same perilous seat that when the heat gets turned up we are ready to defect? Turning back shows a lack of genuine faith. Are you committed to Christ? Will you follow him to the end? Is he worth that? If he is not worth that to you, you don't know him, because you don't know what he did. If you can take an easy route out and defame his name...

And the writer here he doesn't leave this easy to recognize. When they turn back and go back to Judaism and if you turn back and head back to the world or some other place, you know what you are saying. In fact, you are saying I can see him on the cross there. Whatever. It is all right that Jesus was crucified. That is the easy way to read it.

The difficult way to read it is that when a person goes back they are saying he deserves to be there. That is the kind of rejection. When we forsake Christ and when we forsake biblical truth to go back to an easy way we are saying, yes, he was not the Messiah, he was not the Christ. He deserved to hang on the cross he was a lunatic. He was a liar. He

is not my Savior. That is what we say when we defect from the faith. And the writer of Hebrews says that is perilous.

Fortunately, the mess of the congregation that was being addressed here he makes the statement in chapter 10—and we are going to come and see it again in chapter six just briefly, but we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but those who believe to the saving of the soul. Are you in that group that we are not going to turn back? We are going to stay the course, because Jesus is the Christ. There is no other way.

Are you in that camp? Well, the majority of this group was as well. Look at chapter six and verse nine as he tells them the last remedy for avoiding spiritual dullness in addition to practicing the truth and progressing in the truth and permitting the work of God in their lives and perceiving the dangers of retreating. He tells them they must persist in the faith and says in verse nine:

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. 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. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.<sup>34</sup>

He tells them to persist in the faith and to drive forward and to press on. He is calling them and the congregation to a deep rooted enduring exhibiting faith. He calls them to display faith, the type of faith that really saves.

And so do I. I call us this day to persist in the faith that saves. This passage we can't unfold fully, but genuine faith persists to the end. I prefer the term preservation of the saints rather than the perseverance of the saints. Preservation is dependent upon almighty God. Perseverance is dependent on weak, finite man. Preservation of the saints.

Would we persist or why would we persist? What is the reason to persist in verses 13 through 18? The reason to persist is God is faithful to his promises. Why would we persist in verses 19 and 20? We persist because of our confident expectation about our future through Christ. Look at verse 19.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hebrews 6:9-12.

<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 6:19-20.

Let me ask you. Are you sensing spiritual dullness or laziness? In what ways has God been molding your character? Are you more passionate of the cause of Christ? Or is your passion waning and lessening and shortening?

It is wonderful when we no longer need to change children's diapers. It is good when that part ends. It is exciting to watch them learn and apply truths. We have taught them. When our children discern the right way to act and respond and think, we recognize they are maturing. They are growing up. They are recognizing things and employing the things that we have taught them. We must continue to grow spiritually like our children are to grow physically and emotionally. We cannot be satisfied with the status quo. We will progress when we practice the truth, progress in the truth, permit God's working gracious working in our lives. When we perceive the warning that is issued and when we persist in our faith, because he is our hope, how do we respond to this? How do you respond? Maybe you are vibrant in your relationship with the Lord. And I don't question that there are a number in there that have a vibrant relationship with the Lord. How do you respond? How do I respond? You love the Word. You practice the Word. You share the Word. Keep on pressing on to maturity. Don't give up. It is not over. You haven't breathed your last breath. Keep on persisting and asking for God's grace. Maybe your spiritual progress is slower than it should be. Maybe you have not been taking advantage of all the opportunities to grow in the truth that you should. You aren't sharing the truth with others as you should and you have been kind of standing still.

It is time to repent today, right now. It is time to confess your malaise and dedicate yourself to God. What if there is someone else here that maybe really has cooled off spiritually. And you at one point you were zealous for God. And now the zeal is gone. Other things have occupied my mind and my affections and my desires. A lack of zeal is death to spiritual maturity. Do not accept it. Turn today to God in confession and ask him to help you. Ask him for his grace and he will pour it out beyond measure so you can grow.

And maybe there is another group of people. Maybe you have no spiritual heartbeat whatsoever. Maybe you have no interest. You know what? You need to realize you are headed for eternal punishment, but God has provided a way for you to have eternal life. He has provided a way for you to have real life and real joy and certainty about the future. Today you need to embrace Jesus Christ as your Savior and live for him. It is that great passage today is the day of salvation.

You can respond in any way you choose, but you can't respond in any way without knowing the implications. I tried to lay it out for you to consider the implications of your decision making. Now you respond in accordance with what the Word tells us.

Let's take a couple of moments here before we sing our last song in silence and prayer.