

## Hebrews 5:9 – 6:3

### Spiritual Immaturity

*For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe – v. 13.*

Near the end of my Mother's life she had a consistent reply to me every time I asked her how she was doing. *I'm old* she would say. And my characteristic reply back to her was usually the same. *We're all going in the same direction, Mom.* And it's true isn't it? The moment you come into this world you begin to grow older. This doesn't mean all that much to young people who think they have an unlimited amount of time ahead of them, some of whom live their lives as if tomorrow will never come.

But once you reach the point where you realize that most of your years are behind you rather than in front of you then this course of growing older takes on greater significance as you begin to realize the shortness of life and the quickness with which life speeds by. And if you're the least bit concerned for what follows death then you'll tend to the issues of sin and death and judgment to come.

So in a physical sense we're all going the same direction but in a spiritual sense the same thing cannot be said. You would think that the longer a man or woman has been a Christian the more he would advance in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. The wiser he should be and the more useful and fruitful he should be in the Lord's service. But as this section of Hebrews indicates to us this was not the case with the Hebrew Christians.

Look at what Paul writes in v. 12 *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

Do you catch Paul's meaning? He's saying that at a time when they should have been advancing in the faith they had digressed instead. Instead of maturing they were growing more immature. Instead of gaining ground in their understanding and appreciation of the truths of the gospel they were losing ground instead.

The irony of such a condition is magnified when you remember that these were Hebrew Christians. Of all the people that should have understood and appreciated how the religion of Judaism came to fruition in Christianity it should have been the Jewish Christians. Their chief advantage, according to Paul in Rom. 3:2 was that the oracles of God were committed to them.

They, of all people, should have been able to understand how Old Testament worship found its fulfillment in Christ. All of those burnt offerings were designed to point them to Christ. They should have been skilled and able teachers but instead they found themselves needing to be re-taught the first principles of the oracles of God (v. 12).

I suppose in our day and age we shouldn't be too hard on the Jewish Christians of Paul's day because I dare say that from the broad perspective that encompasses Christianity in

our culture today we find ourselves in the same dilemma. So many Bibles – but so much Bible ignorance. So many churches – and yet so much heresy and hypocrisy. We live in a nation with such a rich spiritual heritage and yet there’s so much sin and so much misery and so much bondage – the very things that our religion is supposed to set us free from.

But let’s not make this study this morning an occasion to blame every one outside of ourselves. Let’s rather examine our own hearts and lives and be willing to have our hearts probed with the searching question about your own spiritual condition. How long have you been a Christian? And do you find yourself making progress in your knowledge of God and Christ or do you find yourself digressing the same way these Hebrew Christians were evidently digressing?

I can’t deny that I find my own heart challenged in this respect. I’ve been reading the first volume of a 4-volume set of books on Reformed Dogmatics by Herman Bavinck. In the second section of the first volume of this set Bavinck is taking the time to trace the development of theology throughout church history and as I read his work and see the vastness of his knowledge of any and every work that has ever been written in the realm of theology I can’t help but feel humbled by my own miniscule amount of knowledge in comparison. I find myself, in other words, feeling like a babe when it comes to my own knowledge of Christ and my own devotion to seeking increased knowledge of Christ.

I wonder this morning where it stands with you? Could it be said of you that *when for the time ye ought to be a teacher, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God?* Spiritual immaturity should be viewed as inexcusable and certainly undesirable. And fortunately for us Paul devotes this portion of Hebrews to that very subject. And so I want to think on the theme today of spiritual immaturity. And I want to address the subject with the aim of exhorting and encouraging you to overcoming it. If I could state my subject in a simple sentence it would be this:

## We Must Overcome Spiritual Immaturity

And in the moments that remain I want to address how spiritual maturity is to be overcome. Consider with me first of all that to overcome spiritual immaturity:

### I. We Must Acknowledge the Shame of Such a Condition

If we acknowledge the shame of such a condition then we’ll certainly provide good incentive to ourselves to overcome it. And the shame of this condition becomes plain by Paul’s words in v. 12 *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers* – and let’s just stop with that much of the verse. What is Paul saying but that the Hebrew Christians should have known more than they knew. They should have advanced enough in their knowledge to teach others.

This is not to say that Paul expected them to become preachers or public teachers but he did expect them to have enough knowledge of the basics of the faith to teach their children or to teach their friends and neighbors the way of salvation. Peter writes in his first epistle

in 1Pe 3:15 that we're to *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and [be] ready always to [give] an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*: I believe this verse expresses the standard that is being expressed to the Hebrews and that applies to all of us. We should be advanced enough in our faith to give answer to any and every man that would call upon us to explain the reason for our hope of heaven.

The same standard could be applied to our experience. Paul speaks in v. 14 of the use of their senses. *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*. Do you see how he is speaking in terms of their experience? They should have had the experience to exercise better discernment than they were exercising. And so we must sadly conclude regarding these Hebrew Christians that they were definitely under-achievers both in terms of their knowledge and their experience.

The shame of their condition is magnified even more when we read in v. 12 that they devolved, as it were, into this condition. *ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat*. It was not as if they never knew anything or had never made any kind of progress. We can bear long with slow learners who may take more time than others to learn and advance but the implication here is that they started out well but then reversed direction. They became as babes who could only drink milk.

The shame of such a condition is magnified again in v. 13 when Paul says of them that they were *unskillful in the word of righteousness*. A man who is unskillful in the word of righteousness is a man who doesn't know how to minister the gospel to his own soul much less to anybody else. And when you can't even appropriate the promises of the gospel and know how to apply the truths of the gospel to your own heart then it becomes only a matter of time before the peace and joy of knowing Christ disappear and you become ensnared to bondage and the devil.

Do you not see the shame and the irony of such a condition? One who is supposed to be set free is nevertheless in bondage – one who is suppose to know the peace of God that passes understanding instead suffers constant agitation and anxiety – one who is suppose to know the joy of the Lord as his strength instead knows misery and despair. And in this condition such a person who professes Christ certainly does nothing to commend Christ to others.

*Why would I want to follow that person's religion, the world says, when his religion does nothing for him but to make him miserable? I can find misery just fine on my own without needing that so-called Christian's religion to help me find it.*

And when a Christian has not progressed the way he should have progressed and he's unskillful in the word of righteousness and he finds himself stuck as an infant at a low level of spirituality he gains cause to legitimately wonder whether or not he's ever truly been saved. The gospel is, after all, the power of God unto salvation. But where is the power found in the life of a professing Christian that never gets beyond infancy?

Now we know that it's shameful and repugnant even in the world when a man or woman that should be an adult demonstrates that he's never grown up. I can remember in the days when I was a teenager before I was even saved I had a friend who was also a neighbor that would have large numbers of us out to his house. This man's Dad was always present at these social gatherings but he wasn't present in order to provide adult supervision to a group of kids. He was present to try to be one of the kids. And he would be doing the same things that the kids were doing. He would even use the same slang terms that the kids used. He was a teenage wannabe and I don't think he knew how foolish he appeared in the eyes of those teenagers. This is why I say there's something repugnant even in the world with an a man who ought to be an adult who acts instead like a kid.

How much more in the spiritual realm do Christians appear foolish who never rise above infancy in their faith? And if it isn't enough that they fail to feel the shame of such a condition before the world, how foolish should they feel before God and before Christ Himself? This is a condition, then, that should make us ashamed. God's will is for us all to advance in the faith. And if you find yourself having to acknowledge that *at the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God* – I would hope that the shame of such a condition would provide you with the necessary incentive to do something about the condition of spiritual immaturity.

If we're going to overcome spiritual immaturity, then, we must acknowledge the shame of such a condition. But beyond acknowledging the shame we must begin to constructively deal with the condition. And this leads to my next point which is simply this – if we're going to overcome spiritual immaturity:

## II. We Must Identify the Causes for Such a Condition

One such cause is given to us in v. 11. Speaking with reference to the priesthood of Christ being after the order of Melchizedek Paul writes *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing*. The difficulty of the doctrine here did not lie in the complexity of the doctrine. When Paul says there things *hard to be uttered* he identifies the difficulty as being found in the fact that the Hebrew Christians had become dull of hearing – *hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing*.

The root word to the word *dull* in the Greek is the word *to push*. A negative particle before the root word renders the meaning *no push in the hearing* which is tantamount to saying *slow and sluggish in mind as well as in the ears*. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is Heb. 6:12 where it reads *that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*.

The term, therefore, speaks of a lack of initiative in spiritual things. There's no push, so to speak in the carnal Christian's pursuit of Christ. A Christian could be said to be dull of hearing who doesn't apply himself to the reading of God's word or to the preaching of God's word. He neglects time in the word and when he does manage to spend time in God's word he doesn't concentrate. The same thing applies to preaching. I dare say that I can tell by some expressions that I see on faces from my vantage point that there are

people before me today who are dull of hearing. Their minds drift and they daydream or they become so restless that they can't sit still. Some even make it a routine practice at some point in the message to leave the sanctuary. They could sit through a two and a half hour movie with no trouble but to sit through a 40 to 45 minute sermon becomes impossible. Why? It's because they're dull of hearing.

I can remember one of my Greek professors during my student days at BJU who more than once preached to us against the all too common sin of mental laziness. He criticized the practice of many of us who refused to make our minds work. I dare say that mental laziness is part of our culture today in epidemic proportions both in the world and in the church. We're so focused on our emotions and how things make us feel that we've lost the art of how to think.

And if the word of God doesn't reach our minds then it certainly doesn't reach our hearts either. Contrary to popular thinking in much of the church of Christ, the Holy Spirit does not bypass the mind in order to reach the heart. Those that are dull of hearing like to make believe that this is the case because it provides an excuse for their dullness.

So dullness of hearing is one of the contributing causes to spiritual immaturity. But could I suggest to you that dullness of hearing doesn't get to the heart of the issue. You might say that dullness of hearing is a symptom of an even deeper problem – the real problem being that we're carnal. Note again the words of v. 13 *For every one that useth milk [is] unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.* Underscore that phrase *he is a babe.*

With that term *babe* which means simply an infant or a little child – keeping that term in mind turn with me to **{1Cor. 3:1-3}**.

Do you see the connection in these verses to being a baby and being carnal? The term *carnal* means fleshly or sensual. The lexicon definition is *under the control of animal appetites; Or – Governed by mere human nature not by the Spirit of God.* Under the control of animal appetites – this is our culture in America today. You've heard the phrase *if it feels good, do it. Or if it feels good it must be right.* That could be our national motto. If it pleases the flesh it must be right. And doesn't that account for all the sexual promiscuity that characterizes our culture? It feels good to the flesh so it must be alright. Drugs are okay – drunkenness is okay – promiscuity is okay and why? Because it all has fleshly appeal. It feels good so it must be right.

We can understand this kind of rationale in the world. After all the world is made up of depraved sinners who don't know any better. As rebels against God they're spiritually dead. It's no wonder they're governed by the flesh. I can remember the time in my life previous to my salvation when I was governed by a carnal or fleshly rationale. But in salvation I found deliverance from such a rationale. By the grace of God I was enabled to perceive the misery of my carnal and lost condition and I embraced Christ by faith, who died for my sins in order to deliver me from my self-inflicted misery.

Does it make sense, then, for a Christian who's been delivered from the things that added to his misery to be governed by the flesh? – the very thing that made him miserable and that made him damned to everlasting hell? Like I say, we can understand the world being governed by the flesh to a degree – although it certainly is one of the wonders of the world that sinners continue to hug their sins even when their sins cost them everything and takes them straight to hell. The Christian is suppose to know better but alas, like the Hebrew Christians, too often it can sadly be said of us that we are dull of hearing and we have become babes.

So we see the shame of spiritual immaturity and we've identified a couple of the causes. Thank God, this morning, that there is a cure for such a condition. Would you notice with me, then, that if we would overcome spiritual immaturity:

### III. We Must Identify and Apply the Cure

It's rather humbling to our pride to have to apply the cure but it's good to know that victory can be gained over spiritual immaturity. Notice what Paul says a little ways into v. 12 *ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God.*

We see in this statement a call for a return to the first principles – a return to the basics of the faith in other words. In 6:1,2 we find these first principles listed. I'm not going to deal with them all this morning in any great detail. I'll anticipate doing that in a future study. But look at the list of these first principles: the doctrine of Christ; going on to perfection which I believe corresponds to our sanctification; repentance from dead works and faith toward God; the doctrine of baptisms – and I'll only mention here that in the marginal reading of your bible you'll see the word *washings* – laying on of hands which you could say corresponds to the doctrine of the church – in particular the officers of the church – the resurrection of the dead and the doctrine of eternal judgment.

There must be a return to these basics and I believe the first one listed appears first because it must be first in priority. Spiritual immaturity, then, is overcome by a return to the doctrine of Christ. This is why Paul is placing such an emphasis on Christ in this epistle. We have already seen Christ in this epistle as the Son of God and the Son of man. We have seen Him as the One who took His seat at the right hand of His Father after He successfully accomplished the purging of our sins by His atoning death.

We have seen Him as our prophet and He is the greatest of the prophets. We have seen Him as our King – the One who has won the right to rule the world by virtue of His atoning death. We are in a section now that emphasizes His priesthood. He is our prophet, priest, and king and as we enter into the study of Melchizedek we'll have occasion to note that He is a kingly-priest. In Melchizedek we find the a type of Christ who was a king and a priest.

By returning to first principles we return to the person of Christ and the work of Christ. His work was to fulfill the law for us as our representative and substitute. His work went further, however. Not only did He fulfil the law that we've failed to fulfill ourselves but

He as also paid our debt to the broken law. We forfeited our souls to everlasting condemnation by our breaking the law. The wages of sin is death. That's one of the most basic first principles of the gospel. We have earned death. Death is the only thing that God owes us. But the good news of the gospel is that Christ paid our debt by His atoning death.

I dare say that it does us all good to return to first principles often. Indeed, I think you could argue that each time we meet around the Lord's table to remember His broken body and shed blood we are being called to a return of first principles. And the reason we return to these principles is because they contribute to our appreciation of who Christ is and what He's done for us.

Only by being taken up with Christ and being reminded of the love that brought Him from heaven's glory into this sin-cursed world in order to die for our sins – I say only by being taken up with what He's done will we experience His love being shed abroad in our hearts. And when His love fills and thrills our hearts then we'll regain the motivation to advance in spiritual maturity. We'll overcome our carnal natures because the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

And so we've seen a very undesirable and inexcusable condition, this condition of spiritual immaturity. I must sadly acknowledge that I can relate to it too readily. I know what it means to be dull of hearing and I know what it means to have the flesh gain the mastery over me. Thank God this morning that as shameful and inexcusable as such a condition is – God has been mindful of us. *For he knoweth our frame*; the Psalmist writes in Ps 103:14 *he remembereth that we [are] dust*.

And in His knowledge and remembrance of us He calls us back to the first principles of the oracles of God. He calls us back to the simple remembrance that we are hopeless and helpless sinners bound for hell but that in His love to our souls God sent His Son to die for our sins. I suppose the most basic first principle could be found in the most quoted verse of the Bible – Jn. 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life*.

I dare say that as immature as we find ourselves or as spiritually mature as we may be that familiar verse is one that we love to return to in order to fortify our souls with God's love. And so I would encourage you this morning no matter what level of maturity you find yourself to be in – I would encourage you to bask in the truth of Christ's loving provision to the saving of your soul. It will certainly contribute to your spiritual maturity by giving you the positive incentive to pursue that maturity. The shame of our immaturity provides the negative incentive. The love of Christ in His death on Calvary's cross gives us the positive incentive. There is no excuse, then, for a Christian to be stuck in infancy.

But neither is there an excuse for a lost sinner to remain in his sin. Christ has demonstrated a love for sinners that surpasses any manifestation of love that divine wisdom could demonstrate. I trust that if you're in this meeting without Christ today that you'll be drawn by the cords of Christ's love to Christ and to the saving of your soul.