

58-05-02.wpd --Moving on to Maturity
age, doctrine, righteousness, discernment, ethics
Heb 5:11-6:3

The Christian starts with faith, but must go on to discernment and deed.

INTRODUCTION:

--This passage begins with a rebuke to the Hebrew Christians for being slow in reaching maturity: "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" When we overhear a person exhorting someone else to "Grow up!" we can usually think of areas in our own lives where we need to behave more maturely. The rebuke in the text may or may not be something we need directly, but it has something important to teach us about understanding maturity in the Christian life.

--The job of raising mature children isn't just to give them the facts about the world, but to help them to make the right choices in life. The same is true in the way God is raising us as His children. **HOM.idea.**

--Our Scripture text in Hebrews describes this directive, and uses the illustration of God's Word being like milk for the beginner and like solid food for the mature Christian. Let's look first at the milk.

I. New Believers Need the "Elementary Teachings"

A. The Church is like a "mother" to new believers:

1. Healthy churches have a natural tendency, a built-in reflex to ground new believers in the faith by instructing them in "the elementary teachings." [In my hospital work I teach breastfeeding. God made this mechanism of milk production and milk delivery for human babies. It's satanically insane how our culture has turned the breast into an obscene object of sexual lust, because the human female breast actually reflects the nurturing aspect in the image of God. As RN teaching breastfeeding, I have to confront this breast taboo, which even the church is guilty of spreading. There's no sight more beautiful than a newborn nursing at a mother's breast. God even uses that picture to show His own care for His people through the church, represented symbolically by Jerusalem-- Isa 66:11, "For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."]]
2. Normal new believers are naturally drawn to the church with a desire to know more about God and God's will [normal newborns have reflexes built-in to help them latch onto their mother's even without help

(as seen in experiments filmed in Sweden). I tell my breastfeeding moms, "Everything I learned about breastfeeding, I learned from a baby."]

3. The new believer "lives on milk" because "the elementary truths of God's word" are necessary for proper growth. (Some of these are listed in v.6:1b-2, "the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." [breastfeeding is the best feeding for infants, because what's in the milk keeps them healthy, prevents allergies, helps brain development, and is more safely and easily digested.]
- B. **However**, Christians don't reach maturity by a constant diet of "the elementary teachings." [Breast milk is like magic for growing infants, but God created breasts for babies. He created teeth so that growing toddlers could get a larger amount of calories than mothers can provide through the breast.]
1. Some young Christians may need to spend a longer time "at the Church's breast" than others, but eventually everyone needs to be weaned [the young boy with an allergy problem who tried to keep nursing when his mom got pregnant again: "Yuck!" Then, when he burned his finger on a not lawnmower: "When a little boy is hurt, he gets to nurse!"]
 2. Some churches keep their congregations "on milk" perpetually by letting the pastor be the minister, when the true job of a pastor is to equip the flock for service, which is what ministry means.

TRANS: Young believer's need the elementary truths of God's word, but the God who invented the breast, also invented the weaning process, so that Christians would start taking in "solid food." Let's re-read the rebuke that starts this passage in light of the metaphor of breastfeeding: "though by this time you ought to be breastfeeding babies, you need someone to breastfeed you all over again." Newborn Christians that nurse at the Church's breasts are meant by God to become the Church, nursing other newborns!

II. Older Believers Need "Solid Food" (v.6:1, Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...)

A. Christian maturity is not easily defined.... What does it mean?

1. *To know theology better?* **No**, that's just being an expert in milk.
2. *To be a Christian for many years?* **No**, that's just an old believer.
3. *To become a pastor?* **No**, that could be by charisma or politics.
4. [My own idea of "Christian maturity": parable of a pastor seeking guidance in counseling couple after couple with the exact same problem and getting the exact same answer from the Lord, still praying, "Lord, I'm helpless without your wisdom in this unique situation. Please, direct me how to help them."]

B. The definition is in the text--

1. God defines maturity in terms of "righteousness"-- v.5:13. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about **righteousness** (which is *behavior* that reflects God) [Babies may inherit their parents' characteristics (a father's nose or a mother's eyes), but they adopt their parents' character by listening to their parents' instruction and watching their parents' behavior.]
2. Righteousness in our character is defined in terms of *discernment* and *action*--Heb 5:14 (NASB) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
 - a. Adam and Eve were infants, unready for "solid food." They were being nurtured directly by intimacy with God, just as directly as twin babies are fed by latching on their mother's bosom. But Satan got them to run eat "solid food" off "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" ahead of God's plan, and they choked to death on the fruit!
 - b. When Jesus came, He showed us how to eat "solid food"
 - (1) By putting God's will first-- John 4:34, "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
 - (2) By learning to see and imitate what God is doing in each situation-- John 5:19, Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

CONCLUSION:

--[Breastfeeding bonds a baby to its mother with a tie that goes beyond the weaning process.] Feeding on the milk of the Word endears us to the God of the Word. **The Christian starts with faith, but must go on to discernment and deed.** *Faith* begins on "*milk*", but we learn to make righteous choices on the "solid food" of discerning between good and evil. That discernment is not independent of God, as Satan got it to be for Adam and Eve. It only works in an ongoing intimacy with our Creator, which has been made available to us through Christ. This is the maturity God wants for us. This is the maturity we must pursue.

Heb 5:11-14 (NIV) We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. {12} In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! {13} Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. {14} But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Heb 6:1-3 (NIV) Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, {2} instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. {3} And God permitting, we will do so.