

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

March 31st, 2019

Faith worth Holding Series #8

SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

Focal Passage for Today: Hebrews 5:11-6:2

(For Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 / Ephesians 4:13-14 / 1 Corinthians 14:20)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1. **1 Corinthians 3: 1-4** - ³Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?
2. **Ephesians 4:13-14** - ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.
3. **1 Corinthians 14:20** - ²⁰ Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults;
4. **Hebrews 5:11 – 6:2** - ¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you, because you no longer try to understand. ¹²In 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! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. **6**Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,[a] and of faith in God, ²instruction about cleansing rites,[b] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

OUR HIGH PRIEST: A REVIEW

1. A man fell into a deep pit and couldn’t get out. A medical doctor walks by and sees that the man is in trouble, so he writes the man a prescription, throws it into the hole, and goes on his way. A pastor walks by and sees the man in the pit. The pastor writes out a prayer, throws it into the hole and walks away. A Friend walks by and sees the man in the pit. The friend jumps into the pit. The man already in the pit says, “What did you do that for?” Now, we are both stuck in the pit. The friend says “No, we’re not, because I’ve been in this pit before, and I know the way out. Follow me.”
2. Jesus is a high priest who knows our infirmities and weaknesses, and he knows we are stuck in the pit. He stepped into our pit, put us on his back, and led us home.
3. We need a superior high priest, with a superior sacrifice, for a superior salvation. We need the real thing.
4. Today’s passage is a warning from the author about spiritual immaturity.

THREE REASONS WE NEED SPIRITUAL MATURITY

1. Spiritual Maturity Is Natural, and Staying Spiritually Immature is Unhealthy –

From a discussion thread on Reddit. “I finished college last month. I spent most of it not studying, and wasting my time on the Internet. Now that it is over, I am expected by my family to get a job. I don’t want to get a job. I

don't want to grow up and have to go to work. I want to stay a student forever, where I can wake up at 9, get back from class by 2 (and skip class whenever I feel like it), and spend the rest of my time posting on reddit and 4chan. Now that college has ended, I almost feel depressed. The idea that I gotta start applying for jobs, that I will now need to go out into the real world, find work, make money, and deal with other adults like a man has saddened me beyond description. I want to start all over again, go back to the first day of first year, meet new cool people, get drunk, sit and chat with my buddies after class without a care in the world. Is this what you want for your children/grandchildren?

2. Growing up spiritually strengthens our core, and increases the odds for God's blessings in our life –
 - a. Ben Malcolmson played on the 2006 University of Southern California football team that won the Rose Bowl. He told Fox News this week "From the moment I made the team, I knew God had a purpose for me there. I started pressing into that mission from day one. But he didn't know how hard it would be to help his teammates meet his Lord. He started a Bible study, but no one came. He began a prayer group, but no one joined him. He then placed Bibles at each of his teammates' lockers on Christmas Eve, days before the team was to play in the Rose Bowl. When he returned to the locker room two days later, he found the Bibles torn up and shredded. Malcolmson said it was "the culmination of a season full of discouragement."
 - b. If you were Ben, how would you react/feel? If you were Ben's parent, what advice would you give him about God in this situation? If you were Ben's pastor, what would you say to him?
 - c. Nearly four years later, working as an assistant to Coach Pete Carroll of the Seattle Seahawks, an old friend connected with Malcolmson. He told him that one of the Bibles he gave his fellow players had been picked up and read by a teammate who accepted Christ three days before passing away. Malcolmson concluded, "Even when I couldn't see [God's] hand in the moment, he truly was at work all along."
3. Spiritually mature people are critical to God's plan - In 1957, historian Amaury de Riencourt predicted America's eventual downfall as a republic in his classic work The Coming Caesars. Oklahoma pastor Wade Burleson¹ says that reading Riencourt's "sixty year old book is like reading today's newspapers." The major premise of the book is on page 5. Please listen:

"Expanding democracy leads unintentionally to imperialism and that imperialism inevitably ends in destroying the republican institutions of earlier days; further, the greater the social equality, the dimmer the prospects of liberty, and that as society becomes more equalitarian, it tends increasingly to concentrate absolute power in the hands of one single man. Caesarism is not a dictatorship, not the result of one man's overriding ambition, not a brutal seizure of power through revolution. It is not based on a specific doctrine or philosophy. It is essentially pragmatic and untheoretical. It is a slow, often century-old, unconscious development that ends in a voluntary surrender of a free people escaping from freedom to one autocratic master."²

Burleson contends that this isn't about Republican or Democrat or Independent, but about the way Americans in each party allow the power and prestige of the presidency to rival that of a Roman Caesar. Riencourt traces the rise of Caesarism in Rome and parallels it with the increasing willingness of Americans to follow one man in a national emergency, whether it be economic, military, or social.

The Roman Government collapsed in 476 AD and was destroyed as a country. The same thing happened in Greek culture. Riencourt argues that this isn't political theory, but historical fact. Burleson contends that the collapse of America as a country of liberty and justice for all is coming as a matter of historical fact. I don't know if Pastor Burleson is right, but if he is, then we will need Christians of unparalleled strength who follow the true commander in chief, the God of angel armies, and not human leaders, of any political stripe. We are seeing this kind of totalitarianism against Christians happening across our world now.

¹ <https://www.wadeburleson.org/>. "America's Future is best seen in History's Mirror." Accessed Friday, 3/29/2019.

² Amaury De Riencourt, The Coming Caesars. Penguin Books (Coward-Mann). 1957,(Republished 2013) p. 5.

“YOU CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH: “THE CONTEXT”

1. “You can’t handle the Truth: The author of Hebrews is making his argument, and he makes a comparison to the Old Testament priest Melchizedek. Even though he is writing this in a letter, it is almost as if he senses that his readers eyes glaze over, and they quit listening, so he offers them a warning against spiritual immaturity, almost as if he is Jack Nicholson in a “Few Good Men,” saying emphatically “You can’t handle the truth.”
2. “Handling God’s Word Correctly” This isn’t a problem with the message, but with the hearers.
 - a. We do have a responsibility to present the gospel in a way that people can hear it.
 - b. Yet the ultimate responsibility is on the hearers.
3. “Dull of Hearing” Our text says that the readers “no longer try to understand.” Other translations say “dull of hearing.”
 - a. The actual Greek word is a compound of two words – the first being “No,” and the second being listening.
 - b. The problem isn’t with the physical hearing, but with the heart. There is an internal no to the voice of God in the hearing of the spiritually immature. The hearer isn’t interested in what the Lord has to say.
 - c. Not wanting to hear the voice of God points to a genuine spiritual condition – called spiritual immaturity.
4. They are in the “danger zone”
 - a. Notice that they didn’t start out this way. They have “become dull of hearing,” or in the NIV, the “no longer” try to understand.
 - b. They started out on the right path as all Christians do. 1 Peter 2:2 says to crave spiritual milk like “newborn babes?” Now, these believers aren’t craving God’s word anymore. They have become spiritually dull, and they are in danger of spiritual consequences.
 - c. What are those consequences?–
 - i. being completely lost in the storms of life without peace;
 - ii. Unanswered prayer. Proverbs 28:9 says “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.
 - iii. Inability to legitimate spiritual guidance to people we love, or worse, giving them bad spiritual advice.
 - d. These Christians have closed their ears so much that they never learn for themselves the basic truths of God’s Word. So, when they are in trouble, they have no balance for themselves – so they have to reach out to the teaching of someone else to be ok. So you parrot words without any understanding. Illustration of My UTA Math Professor.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL IMMATUREITY?

1. A Lack of Development – See Verse 12 – “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.”
 - a. Underline the word “time.” You are supposed to grow stronger in Christ over time.
 - b. We have standards to evaluate the health of a baby, right? Height. Weight. Vital Signs. Every baby is different, but there are norms. If a five year-old weighs 15 pounds, there is something wrong. If you have been a Christian for 15 years.

- c. You should be teachers by now. – The author isn't talking about the unique role of teaching. Instead, he is talking about teaching in the same way that every Christian should know enough to lead others along the way. Teaching is the final step of learning.
 - d. "Elementary truths" – the ABCs. It isn't that the "first principles" are beneath the mature Christian. Rather, the sense is that one should be able to teach one's self, and remind oneself of these first principles.
 - e. Paul illustrates it with **two pictures** in 1 Corinthians 3:1ff (Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still **worldly** –mere infants in Christ
 - i. Worldly (people in the flesh) – we're all in the flesh, aren't we? No, he is talking about someone who is controlled by his appetites and his feelings – a prisoner to how a person feels and what they He or she can't help himself:
 - 1. If they want to eat, they can't help themselves. They eat;
 - 2. If the person feels angry, they can't stop themselves; they explode;
 - 3. If the person experiences lust, they can't help themselves, but to engage in immorality.
 - 4. This is a person who is controlled by the flesh. He is motivated and completely captivated by the flesh.
 - ii. A babe in Christ – What's wrong with that? Babies are cute and cuddly? The problem isn't with babies, but with grown-up people who still act like babies. They are 60 years old, but still throw a tantrum like a two-year old. It's all me, myself, I. There is nothing good or great about that. Don't ever make the mistake of equating grey hair with godliness.
2. A Restricted Diet – verse 12 – "You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still and infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.
- a. Milk is great! Who doesn't love milk? There isn't anything wrong with a baby desiring milk. There is nothing more delightful than a true babe in Jesus. But there is nothing more irritating and depressing than someone who should be mature but who has become a babe.
 - b. Inability to digest some of the deeper things of God's Word is a sign of immaturity. Ephesians 4:14-16 reminds us that babes are handed from one person to another, and spiritual babes are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.
 - c. Are you still a babe in Christ, or have you become a babe. Perhaps you are divisive in your Christian life. Babes each have their own crib that they stick to, and spiritual babes have their own fights.
 - d. Babies need a lot of sleep. Perhaps you are spiritually asleep.
 - e. Babies are fussy and cranky. Spiritual babes will fuss over anything.
 - f. Some might be saying today – this does speak to me. I haven't developed as a Christian like I should. What can I do to remedy this?
3. Unskilled in Righteousness – the inability to discern between good and evil. When you are an expert in something, you can discern the smallest details about a product. I read one author this week who was an expert on tea before he became a Christian. His sense of touch and taste and smell became acute to discern quite minute differences in tea.

TWO ANSWERS TO SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

1. Verse 14 – “Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”
2. You need a change of Diet – move from milk to meat;
3. You need spiritual exercise;
 - a. Applying God’s word to your life to discern between good and evil;
 - b. Spiritual Service – not just taking in God’s Word, but also giving it out.

Six Practical Suggestions to move from Immaturity to Maturity

1. Confirm your relationship with Christ; You can give your puppy dog or cat steak and potatoes all day long, but he or she will never grow into a human being, because he doesn’t have the DNA for it. In the same way, people can come to church, read their Bible, but never have personally met the Lord Jesus. If you have no interest in God’s Word, or in being with God’s people, it may be because you haven’t had the seed of salvation planted in your heart.
2. Build spiritual disciplines into your life – start small. 30 seconds telling God your need. 4 minutes – read scripture. 2.5 minutes, just talk to God – not telling him what you think should be in your heart, but what is really there. Tell him your needs; determine to follow him.
3. Practice Listening Attentively – it take practice. Teach your children too.
4. Find a Place of Spiritual Service – too easy to sit, soak, and sour. It will increase your spiritual appetite. 1 Timothy 3:13 – those who serve well as deacons gain great confidence in their faith.
5. Obey what you know to be true – the other meaning to exercise in verse 14. If God were to sit down over a cup of coffee with you. You know, I am so proud of you. I love you so much. I know you have been having some difficult times, but I love you very much. But there is one thing in your life I need to talk with you about – something you need to start doing. Something you need to stop doing. If God were to say that to you, would you know what that “one thing” is, right now? “Light obeyed brings more light, but light disobeyed brings the night.”
6. Make spiritual growth a goal in your life. Steven Covey – wide mouthed, open jar. Empty. Pail of Rocks in first. Is the jar full? Everyone raised their hands. Gravel poured in. Same question – fine grain sand – no one raised their hand. Water poured into it. What is the lesson I am trying to teach you about time management. The lesson is obvious said one student. No matter how much you can cram into your schedule, you can always cram something more into it. The lesson is this: If I had not put the big rocks in first, I could not have added the rest. You have to determine what the big rocks of your life are. Big Rock goes first. Biggest rock of all is to build our relationship with Christ.

CONCLUSION

Illustration with Siegfried and Roy. USA today has an article which interviews Chris Lawrence, the animal trainer for the entertainers’ show who is finally able to talk 15 years after the accident that nearly took Roys’ life. The public explanation/spin has been that Roy Horn had a stroke, and the 400 pound tiger Montecore was trying to save Horn’s life. The real story is that Horn took the animals for granted and made several miscues that day that nearly cost him his life. The accident took place on Horn’s 59th birthday.

INVITATION