

Growing Up In God's Family
Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Pastor Craig Watson

July 26, 2009

Imagine a grown man with absolutely nothing wrong with him who insists on wearing a large diaper in place of his pants. In addition, he carries a baby bottle and tends to make sounds like a baby. When you talk to him, he won't carry on a conversation like an adult, but chooses to use baby talk and will not stay on the subject. Again, there is nothing physically or mentally wrong with him - well, okay, there *must* be something mentally wrong with him if he chooses to dress and behave this way! Try to imagine such a person. What words come to mind? Funny? Bizarre? Strange? Sad? Pathetic?

I would imagine all of these words would come to mind. Now, imagine God looking at His children and finding some who have followed Him for years, yet they remain *spiritual babies*. To God, these individuals look spiritually quite similar to how the man we described in the previous paragraph looks to us. How do you think God would feel about this? Would He consider it funny? Probably not. He would probably consider more pathetic and sad.

Well, very often this is what God sees when He looks at some of His children. He finds those who have chosen not to grow up spiritually, but to remain spiritual infants. This is not new. It has been going on since the early church. In fact, take a look at Hebrews 5:11-6:12 and you will find this very thing described.

¹¹Much more could be said about this subject. But it is hard to explain, and all of you are slow to understand. ¹²By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food.

¹³People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is

right. ¹⁴Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong.

¹We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn't need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God. ²And we shouldn't need to keep teaching about baptisms or about the laying on of hands or about people being raised from death and the future judgment. ³Let's grow up, if God is willing. ⁴⁻⁶But what about people who turn away after they have already seen the light and have received the gift from heaven and have shared in the Holy Spirit? What about those who turn away after they have received the good message of God and the powers of the future world? There is no way to bring them back. What they are doing is the same as nailing the Son of God to a cross and insulting him in public!

⁷A field is useful to farmers, if there is enough rain to make good crops grow. In fact, God will bless that field. ⁸But land that produces only thornbushes is worthless. It is likely to fall under God's curse, and in the end it will be set on fire.

⁹My friends, we are talking this way. But we are sure that you are doing those really good things that people do when they are being saved. ¹⁰God is always fair. He will remember how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them. You belong to God, and he won't forget the love you have shown his people. ¹¹We wish that each of you would always be eager to show how strong and lasting your hope really is. ¹²Then you would never be lazy. You would be following the example of those who had faith and were patient until God kept his promise to them. [Hebrews 5:11-6:12 ~ CEV]

What the writer of Hebrews is addressing is...

I. The Need to Grow Up

Common sense tells us that it only makes sense that we need to grow up spiritually. Just as a child grows up and learns over time, so a follower of Christ needs to grow after they have been born again. When we see a child who hasn't developed properly we tend to feel a sense of sadness. Shouldn't we have the same sense when we see a Christian who has not grown beyond being a spiritual infant even after many years?

The author of Hebrews seems to have this sense of sadness. In fact, you can hear the frustration in his voice when you read Hebrews 5:11. He has just shared with his

readers about Jesus was a high priest for us in the order of Melchizedek and he wants to tell them about this. But, suddenly, in Hebrews 5:11, he stops short and declares, “Much more could be said about this subject. But it is hard to explain, and all of you are slow to understand.”

The phrase he uses – “slow to understand” – is translated “slow to learn” in the New International Version and even more directly in the King James Version as “dull of hearing!” I like best how The Message translates it, though: “You’ve picked up this bad habit of not listening.” The Greek word from which this concept is taken is the word *Nothros*, which literally means “slow moving in mind.” But the individuals to whom the author is referring are not “slow moving in mind” due to a mental deficiency nor are they getting old and forgetful. They had the ability to hear and understand what the author was saying, but because they had not taken the opportunities given to them before to learn the elementary things of God, they were not prepared now to understand these “meatier” things of God.

In verse 12, the author tells them that “by now you should be teachers.” They have been followers of Christ long enough so that *they* should be sharing such truths with others, but they cannot do so because they haven’t learned the truths. Picture, if you will, a dry sponge placed into a bucket of water, soaking up the water. No, I’m sorry, but that is the wrong picture. Imagine instead a dry sponge placed in a bucket of water that *refuses* to absorb the moisture. Instead, when you take it out of the bucket it is as dry as when you put it in the water! This is how these Christians to whom the author of Hebrews is writing have behaved. They have not absorbed the truths of God’s word and, therefore, have not grown spiritually.

What happens if we do not grow up as Christians? *If we do not grow in our faith, we will not learn right from wrong.* In Hebrews 5:13-14, we read

¹³People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right. ¹⁴Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong.

Now, you can understand when a baby does something wrong or something that may hurt them. We understand that they haven't yet learned any better. So, if a baby or a small child moves toward a fire, for example, and is about to put their hand in the flames, we understand that they do not know any better and need to be taught that this is dangerous. But, if a full-grown person sticks *their* hand into a fire, we figure they should know better than to do that. We figure there must be something wrong with them for them to do such a thing. They should know the difference between right and wrong, safe and unsafe.

Hebrews 5:13-14 is saying that we need to grow up spiritually as Christians so that we will know right from wrong. As we grow up in Christ we will learn what we should and should not do, both for our own sake as well as the sake of others. We don't want to make immature or foolish decisions that will endanger us or others spiritually or in any other way. This is one reason that we need to grow up in our faith.

Another reason we need to grow up is that, *if we do not grow up in our faith, we cannot fulfill our purpose in Christ.* Remember what the author told his readers in Hebrews 5:12 that they should be by that time? Teachers! This is true of all of us who have walked with the Lord for any length of time. Now, some will argue that they do not have the gift of teaching, but that is not what he means here. He simply means that we should be examples to others and to share what we have learned on our journey with Christ. This is teaching at its most contagious level.

In case his readers didn't catch his meaning, the author paints a picture in Hebrews 6:7 of what it means to fulfill our purpose. He writes, "A field is useful to farmers, if there is enough rain to make good crops grow. In fact, God will bless that field."

Rain that soaks into the ground helps the crops to grow and to make the field good. Now, imagine that you are the field. When you *receive* the rain and absorb it - The rain being the Word of God and its teaching - then you can produce a good "crop." You will be productive and fulfill your purpose. Then, as verse 7 declares, God will bless you!

The writer of Hebrews didn't want his readers to feel that he was only coming down on them. Notice how he encourages them in 6:9-10.

⁹My friends, we are talking this way. But we are sure that you are doing those really good things that people do when they are being saved. ¹⁰God is always fair. He will remember how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them. You belong to God, and he won't forget the love you have shown his people.

By commenting on the things people do *when they are being saved* indicates that our life in Christ is a journey. Along our journey we are given the opportunity to fulfill our purpose as we help others and show them His love. We need to grow up in our faith so that we can fulfill such purposes as Christ-followers. It reminds us of another important reason for growing in our faith.

If we are not growing in our faith, then we are dying in our faith! Look again at verses 4-6 in chapter 6.

But what about people who turn away after they have already seen the light and have received the gift from heaven and have shared in the Holy Spirit? What about those who turn away after they have received the good message of God and the powers of the future world? There is

no way to bring them back. What they are doing is the same as nailing the Son of God to a cross and insulting him in public!

This is a very sad picture. It talks of those who decide to walk away from the Lord after they have experienced at least a little of what it means to be a Christian. You may wonder how anyone could do this. One reason would be that they did not continue to grow up in their faith. Instead of receiving all the teaching and wisdom that God provided and choosing to put it into practice, they took another route that led them away from the Lord.

The example of the field in 6:7-8 spells out both the good *and* the bad. In verse 8, it tells us that the bad field produces thorn bushes. It does not produce a worthwhile crop, but lies there as a dry piece of land with the weeds rising. In other words, it was a dying field!

Listen to this truth: *All* living thing must either grow, or they die! The good news is that God is always on the scene. If anyone wants to grow, God will provide what they need to grow.

II. The Means to Grow Up

What does it take to grow up in our Christian faith? For one thing, we need *solid teaching*. In Hebrews 5:14, we are told that solid food is for the mature who, by *constant use have trained themselves* to distinguish good from evil. Note that he says that the mature *trained themselves*. They have reached a point in their walk where they are able to learn directly from the Word of God.

This does not happen overnight. 6:1 says that “we must try to become mature and start thinking about more than *just the basic things we were taught about Christ.*” You see, when we begin our walk with Christ, we all need someone to teach us. We need

solid teaching to grow. This is not to say that we reach a point where solid teaching is no longer needed or worth our time. No matter where we are in our journey, we can all benefit from solid teaching. In fact, along the way we must do more than just listen and learn from solid teaching. We, as the author of Hebrews states it, must put it into constant use. We need to consciously begin training ourselves to distinguish good from evil, truth from what is false.

This points us to the second means to growing up: *Solid Effort*. 6:1 states that *we* must try or, as the New International Version puts it, “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” We cannot expect to grow up if we don’t do our part. We must put in the effort!

Hebrews 5:14 talks about how mature believers have been trained and training involves effort. Ask anyone who has served in the Armed Forces about “basic training” and they will share many stories of their time in Boot Camp. They can tell you first hand how important this training was and of how much effort on their part was required.

Solid effort involves a decision on our part. It involves a commitment to do what is necessary to grow! Hebrews 6:3 in the Contemporary English Version puts it well: “Let’s grow up, if God is willing.” Let me ask you: Do you think God is willing for His children to grow up? Not only is He willing, but He is greatly involved in our “growing up.”

In the example of the field that the author gives in 6:7-8, we looked at what happens when the field *receives* the rain. It is described as a useful field if it produces good crops. What is necessary to produce good crops besides watering it with rain? You also need to plant good seed and weed the land to keep thorn bushes and other

growth to overtake it. But, here's the twist in this illustration: *Who* would do these things? I mean, can the field plant its own seed, water and weed itself? Of course not! The *Farmer* does these things. Who, in this illustration where *we* are the field, is the Farmer? God is!

What does this mean? If we are the field and we are to give a solid effort, what kind of effort would it be? We would need to *cooperate* with the Farmer! We would need to receive what God provides us and let Him work on (and in) us. He will help us grow when we make the effort to receive what He offers and put it into practice.

How will we know, though, *how* to grow up? How will we know what it looks like to grow up in our faith? God will provide us with *solid examples*.

In Hebrews 6:9-12, where the author is encouraging the Hebrews by telling them that he is sure they are doing what is necessary to grow up, he also makes this statement in verses 11-12.

¹¹We wish that each of you would always be eager to show how strong and lasting your hope really is. ¹²Then you would never be lazy. You would be *following the example of those who had faith and were patient until God kept his promise to them*.

Think about the many people in our church. God has provided us with examples like verse 12 talks about right here at Kalamazoo Free Methodist! There are those who are further along in their journey of faith than you who are *continuing* to grow and are patiently walking with God and trusting his promises. Good examples are one of God's means to growing up in the faith. He provides them for us when we are seriously trying to grow up.

Not only does God provide such examples *for* us, but as we grow he expects such examples to *be* us! *We* become examples for others to emulate. This is part of growing up in Christ.

As we look to the examples God provides, we see another means to growing up in Christ: Solid Faith! Verse 12 said that the examples we are following *had faith* and were patient until God kept his promise to them. You see, solid faith does not give up. It *is* patient and will hold onto the promises of God. If we are going to grow up, we will need solid faith, because without it, we will end up like those we considered earlier who allowed their faith to die!

Solid faith grows with experience. It is amazing what happens when we experience God working in our lives. Remember the father who brought his child to Jesus for healing and Jesus said to him that all things are possible to those who believe? The man replied, “Lord, I believe; Help my unbelief.” Do you think that, after seeing Jesus heal his child, the man’s faith in God grew? You can be certain of it!

What has God done in your life that has helped build your faith? Remember those times. Reflect on them. As you pray, thank Him for those times. Your faith will grow stronger as you do!

So, we need to grow up in our faith. God has provided the means to grow up. Now let’s consider one more important thing today.

III. The Steps to Growing Up

The first step to growing up in the faith is to *determine where you are in your Christian walk*. Are you a new believer? Have you been following Jesus for a while but haven’t grown much? Perhaps you have grown a lot in your faith. Each of us is at a

different place in our spiritual journey. Where you are in your walk will determine what you need at this point in your journey.

If you are a new believer, you need to be with a good teacher that can explain the basics of the Faith to you. You need someone who can come alongside of you and help answer your questions, encourage you, and be an example. If you are a more mature Christian, your needs will be different than a new believer. You will still need others in your life to encourage you, teach you and hold you accountable. Where you are in your journey will determine what you may need, but you need to determine where you are in your walk.

Once you have determined where you are in your spiritual journey *make a decision to learn what you need to learn, based on where you are in your walk.* Again, this will vary from person to person, but prayerfully ask the Lord to guide you in this process. Let the Holy Spirit reveal to you the areas of your life where you especially need to grow and ask Him to guide you on this leg of the journey.

Don't stop at just learning what you need to know. *Live what you learn.* Put into practice all that God shows you. In this way, you will grow up as well as be an example to those who need to see Christ in you.

This will lead to the last step to growing up that we will consider at this time: *Teach others what you learn.* We have already touched on this, but let me encourage you again to talk about your life's journey. Tell others about how God has worked in your life. Be an example of someone God is working on and working through.

Paul gave this instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 – *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who*

correctly handles the word of truth. Paul was telling Timothy to keep growing up in God's family. We never reach the end until we are with the Lord in glory. So, keep growing. Keep encouraging one another to grow. As the author put it in Hebrews 6:3, "Let's grow up, if God is willing!"