

Hebrews 5:11-14
“it is time to grow up”

Interview with Josh S...

We need communion volunteers to set up and then clean up the communion supplies...

Sermon introduction:

Meet Joe Six pack...

He is a 35-year-old male.

He lives with his parents.

He does not cook or do his own laundry.

He goes to the bars on weekends, works out during the day, and plays Halo 3 on the weeknights with his
bros...

He has no desire to be financially independent, have a career, get married, or have children.

He refuses to grow up. He prefers immaturity.

He has what is now called “Peter Pan” syndrome.

Author Kay Hymowitz calls this the “child-man” syndrome.

Others call it “delayed adolescence”

Others say, “he is not adulting.” Yes, “Adulthood” is a real word.

The “Peter Pan” syndrome is not just an interesting sociological phenomenon, it is wreaking havoc on society, specifically women and the economy (Brooks and Hymowitz).

At its root is immaturity.

Immaturity causes all kinds of problems.

The author of Hebrews is concerned about spiritual immaturity. Spiritual immaturity causes all kinds of problems. Out of great love and concern for the original audience he warns them about the dangers of immaturity.

He urges them to grow up. *He urges them to strive for spiritual maturity.* If they don’t grow up, they are on a collision course with big trouble.

This should cause all of us to ask the question... “*I’m a striving for spiritual maturity?*” If not, what kind of trouble am I heading towards?

How do we strive for spiritual maturity? By understanding two things-

The marks of immaturity

The marks of maturity

First, the marks of spiritual immaturity

There are several marks of immaturity in our passage, let’s look at each one.

Immature Christians are unmotivated.

Hebrews 5:11 (ESV) — 11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

“About this....” About what? The author wants to talk about the Melchizedekian priesthood. He started on this topic in the previous text, but he can’t continue because the original audience is too immature.

The text says they are “dull of hearing.” What does this mean? Another translation reads-

Hebrews 5:11 I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you’ve picked up this bad habit of not listening.

The word “dull” or the words “not listening” can be translated with the words “sluggish, dull, dimwitted, negligent, or lazy” (Guthrie).

These Christians did not lack intelligence, they lacked desire. They had grown spiritually fat or lazy. They did not seem to care about growing any more in their knowledge of the truth.

Their level of interest in doctrine, is similar to a 3rd grader’s level of interest in organic chemistry.

If someone is really listening well, they say, “I’m all ears.” The original audience had plugged their ears to sound doctrine.

Illustration:

“F. R. Webber, in his massive three-volume *A History of Preaching in Britain and America*, tells us that one of the curious by-products of the Great Awakening was a sudden interest in shorthand. According to Webber:

Men and women studied shorthand in order that they might take down the sermons that were stirring the English-speaking countries. This had happened once before in Scotland, and it made its appearance once more in all countries where the influence of the Awakening was felt. It was not at all unusual to see men with a portable inkwell strapped about them, and a quill pen thrust over an ear, hastening to join the throng assembling on the village green to listen to a sermon.” (Hughes)

Many people in the “Great Awakening” were all ears.

On the other hand, the original audience was totally unmotivated to grow in their knowledge of the truth.

This described me well in 4th grade. I did everything I could think of to pass the time during the Sunday sermon. I was totally unmotivated.

Immature Christians are unmotivated... but that is not all...

Immature Christians are ignorant.

Hebrews 5:12 (ESV) — 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,

The author says, “At this point in your Christian life, you ought to be able to teach others the basics, but you can’t even do that.” All Christians should be able to teach the basics to others.

The phrase, “the basic oracles of God” means the ABC’s of Christian doctrine.

He says, “Look, I would love to talk to you about Melchizedek, but I can’t. That is steak, but sadly you are still drinking breast milk (i.e. baby food). You have not pushed yourself theologically. You have not learned anything. You are too immature to handle meaty doctrine.”

What is the baby food (i.e. the basic Christian doctrine) that they should have moved beyond?

Hebrews 6:1–2 (ESV) — 1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

“Repentance from dead works and faith towards God” (this refers to the doctrines of faith, conversion, and repentance)

“instruction about washings, the laying on of hands” (this probably refers to the doctrines of baptism and the indwelling of the spirit, the reference to the holy spirit implies knowledge of sanctification)

“the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” (this refers to the doctrine of Christ’s bodily resurrection, our resurrection, and the final judgment, implying a knowledge of works, faith, and the eternal state).

The author expects these Christians to have moved beyond these basics.

Wow!!!

Don’t forget that book of Romans was written to new converts that did not have seminary training and Paul expected them to benefit from it.

The author of Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says to us that if we can’t explain these basic doctrines, we are immature and in trouble.

Illustration:

Imagine going to a dinner party with friends. The host prepared an amazing feast. Ham, Steak, Turkey, chicken, and Salmon. Broccoli, green beans, fresh baked rolls, and baked potatoes. For dessert there is apple pie, peach pie, and chocolate cake.

Everyone sits down to feast. The host prays, giving thanks for the food. The food slowly makes its way around the table. Everyone is feasting for the glory of God.

But then you notice something strange. Your friend Sally, who is 37 years old, reaches into her purse and pulls out three cans of baby food; one can of crushed peas, one can of crushed bananas, and one can of crushed plums.

You say, “Sally, is that for you?”

She says, “Yes”

You say, “Sally, what is wrong, don’t you want to eat real food?”

She says, “No, I still eat baby food!”

You say, “you still eat baby food. Your 37???”

She says, “Yes, I still eat baby food, I have never been able to move past it.”

What would you conclude? Something is seriously wrong with Sally.

It is normal for babies to eat baby food, but when adults eat baby food there is something seriously wrong.

The author of Hebrews is saying that there is something seriously wrong with the Christian who is ignorant of anything but basic Christian doctrine.

*Immature Christians are unmotivated.
Immature Christians are ignorant.*

Immature Christians are unable to make gospel connections.

Hebrews 5:13 (ESV) — 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

Immature Christians, Christians who never get past the basics, are unskilled in the word of righteousness. What is the word of righteousness?

Does the word of righteousness refer to righteous living?

Or, does the word of righteousness refer to the righteousness that comes from the gospel?

Why can't it be both? We only grow in righteous living as we grow in our understanding of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

With that said, I think the context indicates that "the word of righteousness" refers to the alien righteousness that comes to us from Jesus Christ in the gospel. Isn't this what the author was just talking about in Hebrews 5:8-10.

Hebrews 5:8-10 (ESV) — 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. **9** And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, **10** being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Mature Christians are able to make Gospel connections, immature Christians can't.

Are you able to make gospel connections to all of life?

*An immature Christian is unmotivated.
An immature Christian is ignorant.
An immature Christian is unable to make gospel connections.*

Bottom line...

Immature Christians in the 1st century had very little interest in, knowledge of, or the ability to move beyond basic Christian doctrine.

Things have not changed much in 20 centuries.

Illustration:

Every two years Ligonier ministries interviews thousands of professing evangelicals to get a feel for what American Christians believe.

The most recent study was conducted last fall (2018). Here are some of the results-

52% of evangelicals agreed that "everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature."

51% agreed that "God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam."

78% agreed that “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”

23% agreed that “Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation.”

58% agreed that “Worshipping alone or with one’s family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.

60% agreed “Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth.”

62% agreed that “only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.”

64% agreed that “There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.”

53% agreed that “The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true.”

In Evangelical historian **Mark Noll’s** famous book “The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind” he writes, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” (Noll, 3-4)

And we wonder why Christianity has so little impact in the public square???

If we want to grow up, if we want to be spiritually mature, we must commit to moving beyond basic doctrine to meat.

Objection:

Doctrine divides

Deeds not creeds

Doctrine just makes people proud and divisive.

Can’t we just focus on the gospel? That raises an important question, what is the gospel? You can’t talk about the gospel without getting really theological very quickly.

The question is not whether or not you are a theologian, we are all theologians, the question is are you a good theologian.

Application:

Doctrine is simply summarizing what the bible teaches about any given topic.

If you don’t like doctrine you don’t like the bible.

If you are bored with doctrine; you are bored with God.

Are there certain doctrines that are less practical than others? Yes... of course!

But... We are commanded to love God with all of our minds. This means a rigorous pursuit of biblical doctrine.

A sign of spiritual immaturity is little interest in moving beyond basic bible doctrines.

And lest be clear, the author of Hebrews is not implying that a Christian can or should live in a state of perpetual spiritual immaturity. The whole point of the book is to warn Christians about the danger of falling away. Spiritual immaturity often leads to apostasy. This is why the author is worried about spiritual immaturity. It is much easier for immature Christians to walk away from the faith than mature Christians.

There is a lot at stake.

I understand that I need to study doctrine to grow in spiritual maturity. But, what does this look like? This brings us to the second point...

First, the marks of spiritual immaturity.

Second, the marks of spiritual maturity

What are the marks of spiritual maturity? There are a few...

A mature Christian is able to digest solid food!

Hebrews 5:14 (ESV) — 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Solid food is for the mature. What is solid food? In the immediate context the solid food is the doctrine of Jesus Christ's high priesthood. In other words, the mature Christian can handle the truths of Christ's high priesthood in chapters 7-10 of Hebrews. But the immature can't.

What are some other solid foods?

The doctrine of providence!

The doctrine of justification! (preach gospel)

The doctrine of the trinity!

The doctrine of the church (elders, deacons, membership, and discipline)

The doctrine of God's attributes!

The doctrine of sanctification!

You don't have to get bogged down in the details of the end times...

Stick with the plain things... "The plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things." (Alister Begg)

These things may be plain in one sense, but we will never plumb their depths. They need to be studied rigorously.

Application:

Don't study doctrine to impress your friends, study doctrine because you love God and want to glorify him with every aspect of your life.

Doctrine will help you grow in Godliness.

Doctrine will help you know God better. Christianity is fundamentally a relationship with God.

Let me make some suggestions?

First and foremost, put yourself on a bible reading plan.

Read some good books... (Bible Doctrine, Discipline of Grace, An infinite journey, etc...)

Join a book club...

Join a discipleship group this fall...

Commit to this!!! Your soul depends on it.

Are you convinced that reading will make you a happier, more mature, more obedient Christian? I am!

Let me make a few qualifying statements:

First, we are not all going to be professional theologians and we are not all going to read Herman Bavinck's four volume work "Reformed Dogmatics." But we can all push ourselves to learn more.

Second, this church excels in pursuing the truths of God's word. Keep up the good work....

Third, Spiritual maturity is not ultimately about intellectual ability. And it is not directly connected to theological depth. There are some very smart theologians who have very little discernment because they have not applied what they have learned.

We need to study sound doctrine while working hard at applying it... if sound doctrine does not make us more humble than we don't understand it.

What is the other mark of maturity in our text?

A mature Christian is able to digest solid food!

A mature Christian is able to discern good from evil!

Hebrews 5:14 (ESV) — 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

We now arrive at the main benefit of pursuing sound doctrine. Those Christians who digest solid food are able to do something that is very important. What are they able to do? They are able to distinguish or discern good from evil.

The phrase "constant practice" is important. It means, constant study... in other words, those who constantly eat solid food will over time grow in their ability to discern good from evil.

Sound theological thinking leads to sound Biblical discernment.

We need discernment now more than ever in our culture.

Illustration: Phyllis and Wayne Dyer... she loved Jesus but had a very basic understanding of the Christian faith... she did not have much discernment. She also fell prey to prosperity preachers on the television.

Here are some contemporary issues that require discernment-

What is the Christian response to gender fluidity?

Should Christians watch shows, like "Game of Thrones"?

What is the Christian response to "Climate Change"?

What is the Christian response to sex trafficking and racism?

Should Christian kids go to public schools?

What is the intersection between science and faith?

How should we respond to the books of Joel Osteen?

What about Harry Potter?

What about marijuana?

What about IVF?

What is the world view of the movie “The Incredibles 2”???

Discernment is developed over years and years of hard theological thinking about all of life... discernment does not just happen as we get older. It happens as we apply ourselves diligently to the systematic study of sound doctrine found in the word of God.

Application:

The pursuit of sound doctrine leads to growth in discernment which leads to maturity which leads to your perseverance in the faith...

Remember that the main point of this letter is to encourage the saints in Rome to persevere. As we grow in discernment it increases our ability to keep running the race that is set before us.

We are facing issues that no other generation of Christians has faced. We need God’s help...

Conclusion:

When one of our children was 20 months old, we were very concerned about his health. He was very small. He was not even on the growth charts. No matter what we did he showed very little interest in food. We tried everything to get him to eat, all to no avail.

We took him to the doctor several times to get answers. We were concerned that he was not maturing physically. We were concerned that he was failing to thrive. We were concerned that he was not maturing physically.

Kids can’t stay kids forever! If someone is 27 years old, but they are stuck in the body of a 3-year-old something is seriously wrong.

It is the same spiritually....

If we never move past the basics of Christian doctrine, we will not mature spiritually. This puts us in great danger. If we are not mature spiritually, we will have very little discernment to navigate the increasingly complex culture that we live in.

Fortunately, God has given you, Christian, everything you need to mature in Godliness. He has placed his spirit inside of you, he has given you his word (the Bible), he has placed you in a local church, and he is on your side. Ask him for grace. He will give it.

Read text again...

Hebrews 5:11–14 (ESV) — **11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Let’s pray...