

Finishing Well

Lesson #43

Wake Up! Grow Up!

Nov. 1, 2023

Who is primarily responsible for one's spiritual growth?

The Barna Research Group's recent survey on spiritual maturity >

The majority of Christians today are spiritually shallow.

- 81% believe spiritual maturity correlates to "trying hard to follow the rules described in the Bible."
- Even among born-again Christians, only 30% mentioned having a relationship with Jesus as one of the characteristics of spiritual maturity. Other elements included:
 - 14% Living a moral lifestyle
 - 12% Applying the Bible to life
 - 6% Sharing your faith with others

Among pastors surveyed, nearly 90% said a lack of spiritual maturity was one of the nation's biggest problems- yet a minority of them stated that this wasn't the case in their own church. When asked to identify the most important portions of the Bible that define spiritual maturity, more than 3/4 gave a generic response:

- 1/3 The whole Bible
- 17% The Gospels
- 15% The New Testament
- 10% "Paul's letters" as their source of definition.
- 1/5 of pastors cited specific Bible verses that speak of a mature believer.

Do we not realize our spiritual life is a battlefield, a preparation for a greater life to come? At the moment of justification, all are entered in the race for the prize and are commanded to walk in the spirit so I will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The "reformation" we need is to allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work that was started in us.

- Allow Him to mature us and "grow us up into the fullness of Jesus Christ."

Problem with the Church in Sardis: The Christians were "sleeping" [the walking dead].

Rev. 3:1-4 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. ⁴ Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.

The message to Sardis lists no specific enemies, internal or external. The problem of the congregation in John's time was not with the Jews, the Roman Empire or false teaching. There is no name calling--no liars, no Balaam, Nicolaitans or Jezebel, no synagogue of Satan, no throne of Satan or depths of Satan. Yet no other message is more damaging or more urgent than this one. Walt Kelly announced a generation ago in his comic strip *Pogo*, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" Too often, when we encounter no spiritual adversaries, it is because we are the enemy.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, and the Lord is not deceived."

- The church needed to stir up the living Spirit of God in order to come to life.

George Eldon Ladd defined the Sardis church as "a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power."

Example of: Carnal believers who make a good start, but fail to move on, grow up and learn to experience their position in Jesus Christ.

They are active, engaged in "works," but temporally dead and out of fellowship with Christ.

Hebrews is written to Jewish believers who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior. However, the persecution was rising from the religious Jews.

Therefore, they were tempted to return to the Jewish faith to escape the persecution.

Recall: I brought you out to bring you in.

The writer of Hebrews states 5 admonitions to "heed God's Word" and the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not.

George Whitefield: Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God.

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|-------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Heb. 2:1-4 | Drifting From The Word | > | Neglect |
| 2. Heb. 3:7-4:13 | Doubting The Word | > | Doubting |
| 3. Heb. 5:11-6:20 | Dullness Toward The Word | > | Sluggishness |
| 4. Heb. 10:26-39 | Despising The Word | > | Willfulness |
| 5. Heb. 12:14-29 | Defying The Word | > | Refusing To Hear |

The writer is gravely concerned about the Jewish Christians of his day. The implied threat is that these believers would stumble & not appropriate to themselves the Glories of Jesus Christ.

Result: They would depart from their confession and fall back into Judaism. He gives them 4 "Let Us" statements to admonish and encourage them to remain steadfast in Jesus Christ.

- Heb. 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.
- Heb. 4:11 Let us labor [be diligent] therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.
- Heb. 4:14 Let us hold fast our profession [confession].
- Heb. 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 5:1-10 The writer begins his explanation of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, but he was not sure his readers were ready for what he had to teach.

He wants them to have a deeper understanding of Scripture, but he now pauses between Heb. 5:11-7:1 to rebuke, warn and admonish those who would cease from growing spiritually.

Question: Why were they tempted to go back into legalism?

- They were not going on to maturity in Christ. The answer: *Grow Up*

Important: The emphasis in this section: *Make Spiritual Progress* *Time To Mature*

Heb. 5:11 There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull of hearing [poor listeners]

- The problem was not that he is a dull teacher, but they were Dull Hearers!

Heb. 6:12 That you be not slothful [dull, lazy], but followers [imitate those] of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- Summarizes the main message of this difficult section.

Truth: All believers begin as babes in Christ. Command

I Pet. 2:2-3 Like newborn babies you should crave (thirst for, earnestly desire) the pure (unadulterated) spiritual milk, that by it you may be nurtured *and* grow unto [completed] salvation, ³ Since you have [already] tasted the goodness *and* kindness of the Lord. [amplified]

Truth: *Spiritual Maturity Is God's Objective For All Believers*

Eph. 4:13-14 Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature [perfect, complete] man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive

Heb. 5:12 *Spiritual Maturity Is Lacking in Many Believers*

Not Because We Have Not Had Time > We Have Not Applied Ourselves

Truth: *You are either drifting with regard to your salvation because of neglect, or you are growing because of deliberate effort and attention. But nobody grows by accident.*

Marks of Spiritual Immaturity Heb. 5:11-14

Heb. 5:11 Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

1. Dullness Toward The Word

Result: Dull of hearing = Slothful; condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development; to have no push

- Greek = nothros = person who has the imperceptive and lethargic nature of a stone
- Unable to listen to the Word, receive it and act on it > Immaturity

Gal. 5:7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

Started their "backward journey" by Drifting from the Word.

Heb. 2:1-4

Drifting led to Doubting the Word.

Heb. 3:7-4:13

Rom. 10:17 Faith comes by HEARING and hearing by the Word of God.

Contrast with attitude of the Thessalonians in I Thess. 2:13

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." [Ears to hear]

2. Inability To Share

Heb. 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God;

- Regression; failing to advance; lack of development
- Instead of helping others to grow, these believers were in need of learning again the simple teachings of the Christian life. A 2nd childhood!

3. Failing To Use Time Wisely

Heb. 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers...

- By this time: They had been believers for a time - not recent new Christians
- Every Christian who has been a believer for a few years should be knowledgeable enough in the teachings of Scripture to instruct a younger believer.

Insert: Personal Example

4. Constant Diet Of Milk With No Meat > You have a Restricted Diet

Heb. 5:12b are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat

- Milk is predigested food suited for babies.
- Milk = first principles of the oracles of God; refers to what Jesus did on earth >
 - His birth, life, teaching, death, burial and resurrection.
 - We begin our Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth.

II Pet. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- Meat = What Jesus is doing in heaven; His ministry as our High Priest - We GROW in the Christian life based on the basis of His unfinished work in Heaven.
 - Meat can only be handled with growth & development > with teeth to chew it.
 - Handling the meat of the Word needs to be "worked up to." Need foundation first
 - The meat of God's Word is not something that can be read and understood at a glance.

Quote: Surface level Bible reading will create a surface level Christian.

- Meat requires study, research, thought, reasoning and some struggle to understand.
- To understand, look at it in its context.

The writer of Hebrews is attempting to get them to see Jesus as our High Priest.

- He has previously shown them Jesus the Son of God, Jesus our Savior, Jesus the Word, Jesus the Shepherd, Jesus the Mediator.

Underlying problem: Jesus Christ is not from the tribe of Levi; he is from tribe of Judah.

- He describes Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek.
- This takes some study and thought. Must understand OT characters and dates.
- One must study it to understand how Jesus Christ was a High Priest like Melchizedek.

5. Unskilled In Using The Word > Failure to Apply What We Learn

Heb. 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe [infant].

Consider: An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether he is true to the Scriptures.

Research indicates that upwards of 70% of the contemporary church are spiritually immature/carnal. Is this why the church seems to be so ineffectual? Is this one of the reasons the false prophets are basking in the spotlight while true teachers are ignored? The most obvious case in Scripture is found in I Cor. 3:1-3. Paul rebuked the Corinthian saints.

I Cor. 3:1-4 "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it [bear it]. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal = set on worldly things]. For since there is envying [jealousy] and strife and divisions among you, are you not fleshly [carnal], and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?"

Two kinds of Brethren in the Church: Carnal & Spiritual

Note: Being in The Body of Christ does not shield one from being carnal

Spiritual Brethren in the Church

- Capable of eating meat = food for the mature
- Rom. 8:5 Mind the things of the spirit
- Rom. 8:4 Led by the Spirit

Carnal Brethren in the Church

- Eat on milk for the immature
- Rom. 8:5 Minds the things of the flesh
- Rom. 8:4 Walk after the flesh

1. When one says he is a believer but will not respond to the clear teachings and authority of the Word of God, it is fair to classify him or her as an *infant*.
 - His lack of response denotes the believer's inability to digest the Word of God.
2. Babes in Christ tend to avoid strong doses of the Word because they know the Word will convict them of their wrongdoing, and their consciences will prod them to change.

Infants may even attempt to discredit the Word in their desires to rationalize and justify self-serving actions.

3. *Infants Rebel: Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal]*
They were passive and/or rebellious regarding their new life and position in Him.
They were rebelling against God's commands for ALL believers.

4. Proof They Were Carnal: Immature Display Jealousy & Cause Strife
I Cor. 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Notice the progression: Immature believers don't listen to good counsel.

➤ They rebel and affect others in the body of Christ:

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

The babe in Christ has difficulty putting away the old self, his self-centered ambitions and quest for significance. *Infants in Christ walk like mere men. act like non-believers.*

It is Biblically infantile for one to name the name of Christ and yet continue to display spiritual immaturity and latent insurgency toward God by refusing to adhere to the precepts of His Word. "Throwing protein-rich food from the high-chair is unacceptable. It is rank rebellion."

A.W. Tozer: The average Christian is NOT Christ-like and lives a sub-Christian life.

Average Christians are NOT willing to obey the call to spiritual growth and maturity. God will not compromise with anyone over the issue of disobedience to truth He has revealed to them. Any who knowingly refuses to obey will be brought to a distinct halt in their spiritual life. People are sitting all around in the church, just as though the axle has broken, and not making any progress for years. They are stopped by their disobedience.

Rev. 3:1b I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Paul describes God's truth, light, as very powerful as it is able to make dead things living just by shining on them.

Eph. 5:13-14 But when anything is exposed *and* reprov'd by the light, it is made visible *and* clear; and where everything is visible *and* clear there is light.

¹⁴ Therefore He says, *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine [make day dawn] upon you and give you light.*

When the Bible talks about those who sleep (*and who are still physically alive*), the connotation is that their righteousness, which is received through faith, is not visibly evident, and therefore the person appears to be no different than someone who is unrighteous.

➤ The believer and unbeliever are sometimes indistinguishable because the believer is living a lifestyle that is no different than an unbeliever. [carnal believer = babe in Christ]

- Thus, the believer is "sleeping." While they have righteousness, and therefore are "alive" to God, they are indistinguishable from someone who is a corpse [that is, someone who is an unbeliever, and therefore unrighteous].
- The living believer actually looks dead from a spiritual perspective, but since they are actually alive to God, they are called "sleeping" Christians.

Important: No one is physically unconscious [no one is literally sleeping in this imagery].

Thus the "sleeping" Christian is someone who consciously lives in darkness, where the light does not shine. Therefore, their Christian testimony is compromised.

Danger of Compromise: Compromise is double mindedness.

Compromise stands by when sin could be prevented.

Compromise causes God's people to be indecisive and faithless.

They were NOT physically unconscious in any sense of literal sleeping, but they were indistinguishable from the unbeliever, who is dead [spiritual corpse].

Something happens to a vast majority of Christians somewhere along in their growing years. They quit maturing and revert to earlier stages. It comes to a point in our Christian walk, we ought to be teaching & serving in greater capacities, but we are hamstrung by immaturity.

- Crippled, render powerless or useless.

They need to quit drinking the pabulum of the word, settling once & for all what they believe about the basic tenets of the faith. Then progress to the meat of the things of God.

Christ's Exhortation: Rev. 3:2-4 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die [maturity, spiritual growth] for I have not found your works perfect [complete, mature] before God.

- You are weak & immature. Snap out of your spiritual sleep.