

Finishing Well

Lesson #10

Warning #3 Hebrews 5:11 - 6:12

March 24, 2021

Let Us Go On To Maturity

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.

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

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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 |

Warning: Wake Up! Pay Attention! [4 Let Us Statements from Heb. 4]

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

The bookend verses of warning #3:

- Heb. 5:12 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.
- Heb. 6:12 That you be not slothful [dull, lazy], but followers [imitate those] of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Warning: Wake Up! Pay Attention! You Must Make Spiritual Progress

Problem with the Church in Sardis, whose Christians were "sleeping" [the walking dead].

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."

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.

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.

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].

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.

➤ Snap out of your spiritual sleep. Weak, immature > strengthen

^{3a}Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

➤ Justified by grace through faith - Walk [sanctification] by grace through faith

Col. 2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

➤ Repent > change your mind, turn around and continue by faith

Remember How Your Heard

Just like the believers in Hebrews, the members in Sardis started on their "backward journey" by: Drifting from the Word and Doubting the Word

➤ Now, they are "dull of hearing:" unable to listen to the Word, receive it and act on it.

Rev. 3b Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. ⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who 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.

Strategic Location

Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. The

➤ Original city sat on top of a 1,500' high plateau with one narrow road leading into the city.

➤ The other sides of the plateau were just steep cliffs almost impossible to scale.

Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice: first by Cyrus the Great in 549 BC and by Antiochus the Great in 218 BC. The enemy should not have been able to defeat them.

They were as a fortress with great defense They had everything they needed to experience victory. Why the defeat?

• Its arrogance and overconfidence manifested in failing to keep an adequate watch.

Rev.3:2-3 Be watchful... Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

When Sardis came under attack by Cyrus the Persian, King Croesus and his people retreated to their city, put a detail at one place, and believed they were safe. One night, one of the Persian soldiers saw a Sardinian soldier drop his helmet over the wall of the city. He watched as that soldier followed a hidden path down the side of the mountain to retrieve his helmet. When nightfall came, Cyrus and his troops followed the hidden path up the side of the mountain, entered the city while the guards slept and conquered Sardis. Taken "like a thief in the night."

City Of Sardis in John's Time

In John's time it was a famous and wealthy city on the decline [a shell of what it had been], a center of pagan worship and the site of a great temple to the goddess Artemis. Sardis was dying because the people had grown lazy, degenerate, immoral, complacent and apathetic. The name Sardis became synonymous with promise without performance; appearance without reality; false confidence that heralded ruin. Sardis, proud of its reputation and its past, was apparently trying to ride on the reputation of the past. Suffering from neglect and indifference, its reputation was all it had left. For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived. They betrayed themselves by lack of watchfulness and diligence.

Church of Sardis in John's Time

Reputed to be alive, Sardis is in fact a dead church. Apparently, the church in Sardis had adopted the atmosphere of the city. The church had become a thermometer that registered the temperature of the city instead of a thermostat that changed the temperature of the city. Jesus comes to this lazy, apathetic, complacent church with no words of commendation. Apparently, Sardis started out strong, doing good works, as noted in the letter of "having a name" and "strengthen the things that remain."
Somehow, they wavered or faltered and failed to persevere; lack of watchfulness and diligence.

A great Old Testament analogy is Samson, the charming hero of Israel in the dark, dark days of their history. He was the greatest champion of freedom and the strongest man that ever lived. His name is synonymous with strength and courage due to his many feats and exploits. Beguiled by Delilah who cut his hair, he lost his strength. The haircut symbolized his unwillingness to obey God. Due to disobedience, God took his strength away.

➤ When he was confronted with danger and tried to meet it, he could not overcome.

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!"

But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

Consider: It was the same old Samson with the same living name that was synonymous with strength, but the power was gone. The result was Samson's defeat, imprisonment, blindness and death. That miserable wreck, that pitiful, blind giant tied with two brass chains stooping over a grinding mill in the prison of Gaza is depicted as one tragic figure.

That was Sardis, once strong, once virile, once alive, once a powerful church began to sow sin. They became weak, blind, dead and were bound in brass chains grinding the grain of sin's prison, not even knowing that God had long since departed.

Prov. 22:8 He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.

Remedy: Rev. 3:1a These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God...

The seven-fold ministry of the Spirit, defined in Isaiah 11:1-2, emphasizes the fullness and completeness of the Holy Spirit's ministry in His power and operation.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: ² And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

Spirit of the Lord	Member of the Trinity
Spirit of Wisdom	Intelligence or right use of knowledge
Spirit of Understanding	Insight, perception, able to discern
Spirit of Counsel	Prudence or ability to give good advice
Spirit of Might	Force, power, strength (spiritual warfare)
Spirit of Knowledge	Personally experience or know God
Spirit of the Fear of the Lord	Profound respect or awe for God

Jesus Christ as head of the church brought HOPE in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of His power to bring LIFE.

- He is ALL we need to succeed and triumph as Christians and as the church.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, having left [once and for all] the elementary principles of the teaching of Christ, LET US go on to perfection. [5th Let us statement]

- He is emphatic: There is a peril in not progressing!

Consider: Believers who rebel against God and will not submit to sanctification will miss out on the blessings of their inheritance today and will suffer loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Press on = #5342 = phero = be borne along like a ship by the wind

The use of the passive voice:

- Emphasizes the exertion of power on the individual from an outside source.
- Conveys the thought of the need of the recipient to willingly surrender to this outside influence

The present tense emphasizes the continual need for this activity.

- The writer lumps himself in this group needing to be continually borne along.
- The idea is "Let us be carried along by God's Spirit."
- Let us be carried forward to maturity
- God enables us to progress as we yield to Him, receive His Word and act on it.

Submit to the Holy Spirit whose transforming power will complete the work in you. Phil. 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; [Promise> Reckon> Surrender>Thank Him]

Paul's Prayer: Get Your Hands On Your Wealth

Eph. 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul's prayer emphasizes enablement > realize how vast your wealth is and by faith use it. Each of the 4 petitions leads into the next one. He prays our inner man might have spiritual strength which will lead to a deeper experience with Christ which will enable us to apprehend [get hold of] God's great love which will result in our being "filled unto all the fullness of God."

I. Spiritual Strength

1. The PRESENCE of the Holy Spirit in my life is evidence of my justification.
2. The Holy Spirit's POWER enables me to live and walk as a Christian.
 - a. Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
 - b. Luke 4:1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit - Jesus performed His earthly ministry in the power of the Spirit.

Truth: The Holy Spirit is MY ONLY RESOURCE to live the Christian life.

Note: There are 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Acts. He was crucial in the life of the early church.

"If God took the Holy Spirit out of this world, most of what we Christians are doing would go right on - and nobody would know the difference!"

3. His power is given to us "according to the riches of His glory." Jesus Christ returned to glory and sent the Spirit from heaven to indwell and EMPOWER His people.
 - a. It is not necessary for us to beg or "work something up." The power is sent down.
4. This power is for our "inner man," the spiritual part where God dwells and works.
 - a. Scripture tells us our inner man can see, hear, taste, feel, must be exercised, cleansed and fed. The inner man can be renewed spiritually in spite of outward physical decay day by day. [II Cor. 4:16-18]. It is this inner power that causes us to succeed.
5. The Holy Spirit empowers my inner man. My spiritual faculties are controlled by God.
 - a. When I yield to the Spirit and let Him control my inner man, I succeed in living to the glory of God.
 - b. I feed my inner man the Word of God, pray, worship God, confess and keep my vessel clean and loving obedience.

II. Depth

1. Paul used 3 verbs to convey the idea of spiritual depth

a. Dwell - Settle down and feel at home - He yearned for Christ to settle down and feel at home in their hearts - not a surface, but an ever-deepening fellowship.

Illus.: Abraham - God came down Himself, brought 2 angels with Him and visited Abraham's tent. They talked with him and ate a meal. They felt at home because he was a man of faith and obedience.

Their other task was to investigate the sins of Sodom because God planned to destroy Sodom & Gomorrah. Lot, a believer, was living in Sodom. God wanted to warn him to get out before judgment fell. BUT the Lord Himself did not go to Sodom.

- He sent the 2 angels. He did not feel at home in Lot's house.

b. Rooted - Tree roots must go deep into the soil for nourishment and stability.

Jer. 17:5-8 "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. ⁶ For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.

⁸ For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Truth: If there is to be power in my life, there must be depth and the roots must go deeper and deeper into the love of Christ.

c. Grounded, an architectural term, refers to the foundation. If you don't go deep, you can't go high. The trials of life test the depth of our experience. The storms that blow through reveal the strength of our roots.

III. Apprehend

1. Comprehend = mentally grasping something; Apprehend = laying hold of it for yourself

Consider: It is possible to understand something but not make it your own.

2. We need to lay hold of the vast expanses of the love of God.

Truth: I NEVER have to worry about having inadequate spiritual resources to meet the demands of life. Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

IV. Fullness

1. God wants me to experience His fullness. The measure of my fullness is God Himself.

Consider: It is tragic when we use the wrong measurements in examining our own spiritual lives. We measure ourselves by a weaker Christian.

Paul says the measure is Christ and we cannot boast about anything. [Eph. 4:11-16]

2. The means of my fullness is the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Truth: Positionally, I am complete in Him and all resources are there, but experientially, I enjoy only the grace I apprehend by faith.

Question: Have you been cut off from your source of power? Unbelief, unconfessed sin, not watching, worldly attitudes - these can ROB us of the POWER of the Holy Spirit.

Truth: A Christian robbed of power cannot be used of God.

John 15:5 Without Me, you can do nothing.

Andrew Murray: "Water always fills the lowest places first. The lower and emptier a man bows before God, the quicker and fuller the inflow of God's glory will be."

Jim Elliot: "God forgive me for being so ordinary, while claiming to know such an extraordinary God."

Eph. 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.