

**Lesson 17**  
**Stagnation in the Christian Life**  
**Hebrews 5:11-6:2**

Did you know it is possible for a Christian to stagnate in his spiritual life? There can be periods when a Christian has arrested spiritual development. An unchanging principle is, that at any given time, a Christian is either progressing or regressing in Christian growth.

To have retarded maturity in Christian development, can be a very serious matter. For one to stagnate and regress is to be in an abnormal spiritual state. Stagnation results when one does not push on into maturity. While a true Christian can stay in a baby state, this is a very dangerous state to remain in, for without development we cannot be sure that we have the life of Christ in us. In the physical realm, we know a child is alive and healthy when we see signs of life with normal patterns of growth and development. This can also be applied over to the spiritual realm. If there is continual refusal on the part of a professing Christian to push on into maturity, perhaps a person is not really saved and has not the life of Christ in him. This is always the cloud of threat that hangs over the perpetual, nominal, baby, professing Christian.

This was the exact problem of the professing Hebrew-Christians to whom the writer addressed the book of Hebrews. He was convinced that the great majority of the Hebrew-Christians were truly saved, but he could not be sure about some of them.

Apparently, there were not many mature Christians in that assembly, and many of the babes in Christ were so weak it was difficult to distinguish them, in some of their actions, from unsaved people. The author could not tell whether some were babes in Christ or just lost church members, so he writes to encourage the true believers to push on in the faith to prove without any shadow of doubt that they are true believers.

#### BACKGROUND

In order to show why it is possible for a Christian to stagnate, it is important that we once again understand the background of this book. These Hebrew-Christians were under a great deal of persecution from the unsaved Jews in their community. These Christians had come out of Judaism and professed Christ as personal Savior, but, under the intense social persecution, many were thinking about returning to their old religion of Judaism where they would be accepted in the community. This book was written to warn these professing Hebrew-Christians of the devastating results of turning from Christ back to Judaism.

In Hebrews 5:1-10, the author began a deep discussion on the person of Jesus Christ and His relationship to the Melchizedekian priesthood, but he stops abruptly to tell them that they did not have the spiritual discernment to appreciate it. There are two basic reasons why these professing Hebrew-Christians were not ready for this deep truth: 1) Immaturity because of willful backsliding (5:11—6:2), and 2) Some may be apostates (professors) who never were really “born again” (6:3-9).

## DIGRESSION - Hebrews 5:11

**“Concerning him we have much to say ...”** -- The author had many wonderful things to tell these Christians about Christ and how He is the fulfillment of the Melchizedekian priesthood, but they were babes and could not take it in.

If much of the book of Hebrews has been boring to you, especially the sections on Christ’s priesthood and Melchizedek, then you know you are a babe in Christ with little hunger for deep truth.

**“And it is hard to explain ...”** -- The author had a very difficult time explaining, or communicating, the truth of Christ to these professing Christians because they were immature and indifferent to deep spiritual truth.

The problem was not with the subject matter but with the readers. They had spiritual problems!

**“Since you have become dull of hearing.”** -- These Hebrew-Christians had not always been dull of hearing, but digressed to this state. The word “dull” means slothful or lazy, so we can say that they had become sluggish, insensitive and numbed to spiritual truth. They were hearing words without giving attention to what was being taught. They had become spiritual sluggards and loafers. The Word of God was making no impression upon them and they were merely going through the externals of Christianity. They were hearing but not grasping or applying truth to their experience.

There are many twentieth century Christians who are sitting, soaking and souring. They are spiritually defunct. They are much like the church of Laodicea that was neither hot nor cold. **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit (vomit) you out of My mouth”** (Rev. 3:15-16). A state of spiritual lukewarmness makes God sick, for He hates neutrality and indifference and will vomit these people out of His mouth.

These Hebrew-Christians were not always dull, lazy and slothful. Apparently, right after they were saved, they gave attention to the Word but they grew weary and lost their first love. They were like the Church at Ephesus. **“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love”** (Rev. 2:4). Christ was not in a central place for them and the result was indifference and slothfulness.

Avoiding social persecution had become the one digression that kept them from pushing on in Christ. If they took their stand for Christ, they were persecuted. Therefore, they compromised the truth to avoid persecution, and the result was a failure to grow into maturity.

## REGRESSION - Hebrews 5:12

**“For though by this time you ought to be teachers ...”** -- Most of these people had claimed to be followers of Christ for years, but they had not matured. The book of Hebrews was written about

30 years after the Lord's death and most of the Hebrew-Christians were second-generation believers (Heb. 2:3). Some of them had been saved as many as fifteen or twenty years. They had a Christian culture and background, yet they were indifferent to Christ. They took their handed-down Christianity for granted. These Christians should have been teaching and helping others in spiritual things, but they could not because they were not mature Christians.

It is quite clear from this verse that physical age does not produce maturity in Christians. It is possible to have been a Christian for years and still be a babe in Christ. An older person may be wise in worldly wisdom but immature in spiritual understanding because he has little grasp of the Bible and how it is to be applied to life. There is a great difference between worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom.

There are multiple thousands of Christians who have been saved for years and still cannot teach the basic truths of Christianity or apply, with any consistency, the Word of God to their lives. Nor are they capable of pointing someone to Christ. Why? Because they are babes!

Apparently, God feels that all Christians should become teachers in some way. Maybe one does not have to teach in a public sense but he should be able to be an effective witness, defend the faith and instruct others on a personal level. One of the clear marks of immaturity is inability to instruct others.

Somewhere I read of a principal in a high school who had an administrative post to fill. He promoted one of his teachers with ten years of teaching experience to the job. When the announcement was made, another teacher in this school came to him terribly upset. She said, "Why did you put that teacher in this position? He has only had ten years of experience and I've had twenty-five years, yet you passed me over in favor of him." And the principal said, "I'm sorry, you're wrong. You haven't had 25 years of experience. You have had one year's experience 25 times."

This was the problem with the Hebrew-Christians. They had been going through the same experience again and again all the years of their Christian life but had never grown.

***"You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God ..."*** -- The elementary principles probably deal with Jesus Christ as He is revealed in types and shadows in the Old Testament. They needed to be taken back to the elementary things of Christ.

They had to be taught again. They had not progressed but regressed, in the Christian faith. They had to go back to the very simple truths. They had to learn the A B C's of Christianity all over again because they regressed in spiritual maturity.

A Christian is either going forward or backward in his Christian growth -- he is never standing still!

***"And you have come to need milk..."*** -- Milk is a baby's diet and in this context refers to the "elementary principles." They could not graduate from the A B C's of the Old Testament

Scriptures concerning Christ. They digressed to such a point they went back to the milk stage of Christianity.

Every boy wants to grow up and be a man. Every Christian should want to grow up, and, if he does not, he is abnormal and a spiritual freak. And if this attitude persists, perhaps he is not even a true believer.

**“And not solid food.”** -- They were not ready for the solid food of deep spiritual truths concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Babes in Christ have trouble with the most simple doctrines of Scripture, and they gag and choke on the T-bone steak of deep spiritual truth.

DIGESTION - Hebrews 5:13,14

**“For every one who partakes only of milk is not accustomed (without experience) in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”** -- A baby Christian is not skilled, or is without experience, in the use of the Word. It is possible for a person to know a great deal of the Word intellectually but still be a babe because he does not apply the Word of God to his experience. He does not apply the word of righteousness so as to have a righteous life.

Milk is good for babies, but babies have to eat strong food eventually or they will never grow. They will become stunted in their growth.

Knowledge of the Word and use of the Word brings maturity to dedicated Christians. The key to maturity is TIME and PRACTICE (use) of the Bible but only as it produces a righteous life.

**“But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”** -- It is through practice, or application, of the Word of God as a habit pattern that one becomes mature. Knowledge must be applied or it is of no value. The mature Christian through obedience to the Bible has trained his senses to discern good and evil.

The mature believer is trained to discern doctrine, but the immature believer is doctrinally undiscerning. He is tossed about by every wind of doctrine. He gives himself to religious fads which seem to come in ‘cycles -- faith-healing, abuse of spiritual gifts, legalistic practices, extremes in prophecy.

The immature believer is emotionally unstable. He is always operating on his feelings and has a mystical approach to Christianity. He loves emotional meetings and jumps from one conference to another. He also has great fears and insecurities and is constantly fighting religious bogey men. He fears the communists, the liberals, the radicals, the extremists, the Catholics almost to the point of frenzy and hate.

The immature Christian is a personality follower. He is easily led and attaches himself to one preacher or system, and he reads only the books or tapes of that man or system.

PROGRESSION - Hebrews 6:1-2

***“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ ...”*** -- They were to leave the A B C’s of Christ as taught in the Old Testament and New Testament and get on into the real meat of the Word.

***“Let us press on to maturity ...”*** — This is an exhortation for Christians to push on deeper into the things of Christ, not going backward but going forward. Christians are to get off the milk and get on to the strong meat of the Word.

The younger generation would say, “Let’s get on with it!”

***“Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God.”*** -- The author mentions six things that these Hebrew-Christians are to leave so they can push on into maturity. These things may refer to basic Christian truths or to simple Old Testament truths. These are “bridge doctrines” between biblical Judaism and biblical Christianity. They are transitional truths which every true Jew and Christian believed and they relate to both systems.

The Old Testament taught repentance and faith towards God and so does the New Testament. This may refer also to elementary Christian principles concerning conversion. Christians are to get off the simple truths of faith and initial repentance and get to the deeper truths of Christ. The “simple gospel” preached over and over again to Christians is producing weak and immature Christians. The “simple gospel” is feeding people milk and they need to get to the meat. Many Christians never get beyond the elementary things.

Major Ian Thomas once said, “You know, I have discovered an interesting thing about American Christians. They do not usually come to church to learn anything. Whatever they do not yet know themselves they think is heresy. What they want to hear is the same old stuff so they can say, “Amen, brother. Amen!”

***“Of instruction about washings (baptisms), and laying on of hands ...”*** -- The “washings” refer to the Old Testament purifications of priests by washing which was part of the Levitical economy (Heb. 9:10). Priests would wash all day long because of defilement. “Laying on of hands” refers to the Old Testament ritual of a person laying his hands on a sacrifice he was about to offer making an identification with that offering (Lev. 1:4). These Hebrew-Christians attached great significance to these things because of the Old Testament training but they were but types and shadows of the reality found in Christ.

The washings and laying on of hands may be a bridge to New Testament teaching concerning the ordinances of the church, namely baptism. It may be that laying on of hands was practiced before a Christian was baptized, which had its type in Old Testament washings.

Christians are to graduate from arguments over the mode of baptism which are merely symbols of one’s reality in Christ. To fight over baptism is infantile.

Dr. A. T. Pierson was in a church once that was arguing over the mode of baptism and he said to

them, "Quit your baby-talk!"

***"And the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."*** -- The Old Testament taught the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment and these elementary things Christians are not to forget but they are to go beyond them.

These Old Testament truths are a bridge to New Testament truths which also reaffirm the resurrection unto life and the resurrection unto eternal judgment. These are elementary and basic truths about prophecy or eschatology. We must be careful that our fascination with prophecy does not take us away from our daily love and walk with our Great High Priest.

Ray Stedman makes this comment, "The last two items, 'resurrection and eternal judgment,' obviously have to do with the themes of prophecy, or eschatology. This would include the time of the rapture, the question of who the Man of Sin is, where the church will be during the Tribulation and so on. All these are important truths, the writer does not deny that, but they are so inclined to puff people up with knowledge instead of to edify in love."

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps some of you a few of the Hebrew-Christians, You have made a profession. Perhaps you have been a professing Christians for years or for only a short while. Whatever, you have become dull of hearing. You have become insensitive to spiritual truth. Perhaps your life is so filled with spiritual immaturity that you have many of the same characteristics of the unsaved person. You may be a babe in Christ. However, you may also be a mere professor of Christianity but outside of God's saving grace.

Are you saved? Are you a churchman but not a Christian? If you are not sure whether you are saved, trust Christ as your Lord and Savior. After you have made that initial commitment to Christ, then begin to push on into maturity so that you might prove and demonstrate that you are really a converted person. Never be satisfied with an elementary and simple understanding of Christ but push on into maturity!