

Suffering Because of Spiritual Growth

Lesson 6

STAGNATION BECAUSE OF IMMATURITY

Hebrews 5:11—6:2

Did you know that a Christian is either progressing or regressing in Christian maturity? While the great thrust of a Christian's life is one of progression, it is possible for him to have periods of stagnation and actually regress in spiritual maturity.

To stagnate and regress is an abnormal spiritual state, but it is possible for a true Christian. Stagnation is the result of immaturity, for the Christian fails to push on in his life towards spiritual maturity.

BACKGROUND

It is helpful to know something of the background of the Book of Hebrews to understand why it is possible for a Christian to stagnate. These Hebrew-Christians were under a great deal of social persecution from the Jews in the community. These Christians had come out of Jewish religion 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 that the results of turning from Christ back to Judaism had very serious consequences.

The author of the Book of Hebrews had begun a deep discussion on the person of Jesus Christ and His relationship to the Melchizedecian priesthood (5:1-10) but stopped quickly to tell them that he could not continue with this discussion because they did not have the spiritual maturity to appreciate it. There were 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 have been apostates (professors) who never were really "born again" (6:3-9).

DIGRESSION Hebrew 5:11

"We have much to say about this"

The author had wonderful things to tell these Christians about Christ as He is the fulfillment of the Melchizedecian priesthood, but they were babes spiritually and could not take them in.

"but it is hard to explain"

The thought is that these deep truths were hard to be interpreted for these dull Hebrew readers. The author had a hard time communicating truth to these immature and indifferent Christians.

"because you are slow to learn"

This should be translated, "Because you have become dull of hearing." They were not always dull of hearing, but now they were. Why? Because they had failed to grow up spiritually.

"Dull" means sllothful or lazy. 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, for they were merely going through the motions 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 inadequate. 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 wish you were either one or the other! So, because you***

are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Rev. 3:15-16). A state of spiritual lukewarmness makes God sick, for He hates neutrality and indifference!

These Hebrew Christians were not always dull, lazy and indifferent. 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 of Ephesus. ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”*** (Rev. 2:4). Christ was not in a central place for them and the result was indifference to Christ.

Avoiding social persecution had become the one digression that kept them from going forward in Christ. If they took their stand 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

“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers”

The Book of Hebrews was written about thirty 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 to twenty years. They had a Christian culture and background, yet they were indifferent to Christ. They took their second generation 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. Age does not produce maturity in Christ. 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 thousands of Christians who have been saved for many years yet still cannot teach the basic truths of Christianity, or apply with any consistency the Word of God to their lives or point someone to Christ. Why? Because they are babes.

Apparently the author of Hebrews felt that all Christians can become teachers. 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 the inability to instruct others.

Each Christian should be a teacher. You can teach truth by being a personal witness for Christ, sharing the simple and elementary truths of the gospel, and by teaching your own children. You can teach in Sunday school or have a child evangelism class. You may desire to teach a home Bible class of just a few people. Perhaps you have special abilities in public teaching. The opportunities to be a teacher are unlimited.

“you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.”

The “elementary truths of God’s word” deal with the person and work of Jesus Christ as revealed in types and shadows in the Old Testament. They need 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 basics 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!

“You need milk”

“Milk” is a baby’s diet and in this context refers to the “elementary truths.” They needed the basics of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Christ. They digressed to such a point that they went back to the milk stage of Christianity. Every boy wants to become a man. Every Christian should want to grow up, and, if he does not, he is abnormal and a spiritual misfit, and perhaps not a true believer.

“not solid food!”

“Solid food” refers to the deep truths concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. A spiritual babe is one who has an inadequate knowledge of Christ and does not apply the Word to his experience.

Babes in Christ have trouble with the simplest doctrines of scripture, and they gag and choke on the meat of deep spiritual truth.

DIGESTION Hebrews 5:13-14

“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.”

A baby Christian is not skilled 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 in time to dedicated Christians. The key to maturity is TIME and USE (practice) of the Bible.

“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

It is through use 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.

Those who are mature can discern good and evil. They have a consistent Christian life based on conviction and are not tossed around by every wind of doctrine.

PROGRESSION Hebrews 6:1-2

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ”

They were to leave the basics of Christ as taught in the Old Testament and get on into the real meat of the Word.

“and go on to maturity”

This is an exhortation for a Christian to go deeper into the things of Christ, not going backward but going forward. Christians are to get off milk and get on to strong meat.

“not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

These things may refer to basic Christian truths or to simple Old Testament truths. Whichever, Christians are to move from elementary truths into the deep truths of Jesus Christ. These are “bridge doctrines” between Biblical Judaism and Biblical Christianity. They are transitional truths which every Jew and Christian believed and they relate to both systems.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

The Bible says that every Christian should be a teacher of the truth. A teacher must study and prepare himself adequately to teach. You must start today to learn God’s Word in order to teach it to others. Do not make excuses about your inability to teach. God says you are to be a teacher, and if you are not a teacher of the truth in some capacity, then you have not matured much in the Faith and you are living an abnormal Christian life.

Perhaps God has given you a special gift of public teaching. The only way you can discover this gift is to try teaching publicly. If you fail, then you have the gift of teaching privately and individually. Perhaps your gift is not in teaching Sunday school but in teaching home Bible classes. You may be gifted at teaching children rather than adults. Whatever your special gifts and abilities are, you are to be teaching the truth, for this is a mark of a mature Christian.

It takes time and use of the Word to become a mature Christian. God will bring you maturity in time, providing you are learning the Bible and applying it to your daily life. You are going to make many mistakes as you push on into maturity, but these are a blessing, for it is impossible to grow in Christ without making some mistakes. You should learn from your mistakes and seek not to do them again.