

**Hebrews 5:11-6:12**  
**(Matthew 7:24-27)**  
**“On to Maturity”**

## **Introduction**

Every parent and every teacher identifies with our author at this point: “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.... You need milk, not solid food ... solid food is for the mature” (5:11f).

The author has several times introduced the name of an obscure Old Testament figure, a priest-king named Melchizedek, who appears briefly with Abraham in Genesis 14 and whose name is then invoked once in Psalm 110. The author would like very much to be able to assume a level of spiritual maturity and Scriptural literacy on the part of his readers that would enable him to launch into the deep teaching about how Jesus is “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (5:6), teaching that he will finally commence in chapters seven and following. But first, he must warn his readers of the danger of remaining spiritually immature, and encourage them – and us – to “go on to maturity” (6:1).

These verses have been a source of anxiety and confusion to Christian people, pastors and theologians, and I hope that when we go to the Lord’s Table this morning, we will approach it with a deeper understanding and appreciation of these verses than we have ever had before.

## **Body**

### **1. What is the danger being described here (5:11-6:3)?**

*It is, quite simply, spiritual immaturity caused by spiritual laziness.* Have you noticed in our study of Hebrews how the author continually warns his readers, first not to drift away through inattentiveness (2:1f), then not to fall away from “an evil, unbelieving heart” (3:12f) and now warns not to fall away irrevocably through laziness and immaturity (5:11f)? He does not see these simply as dangers leading us to miss God’s best and highest. Rather, he seems to fear that we might actually drift or fall so as never to return to a living faith. Clearly, if this is God’s Word to us, then it is crucial that we seek to understand what the author means by these warnings.

*So, we first must ask what he means by “milk”?* And the answer is surprising: what he calls “the “elementary doctrine of Christ,” repentance and faith, baptism, ordination, resurrection, judgment. In other words, he is describing a basic course of theology, from the doctrine of Christ to the doctrine of salvation to the doctrine of the church and finally the doctrine of last things.

This is considered strong meat in today's church, but to the early church it was simply the milk of the Word, the necessary first things that must be mastered by every Christian in order to begin life in Christ on a sure foundation.

*What does he mean by "solid food"? Most misinterpret this by saying that milk is the simple gospel while solid food is biblical doctrine. But that cannot be sustained because he calls us to move on and build upon the very doctrines usually commended by teachers as the solid meat. So what is the solid meat to which the author refers? He does not tell us explicitly, but it seems clear from the context and from what he does say that he has in mind a two-fold idea: *First, that learning is meant for living.* Knowledge of biblical doctrine is foundational for our life in Christ, but is no substitute for that life. I want my house to have a strong foundation, but do not want to live on a foundation, exposed to the elements. Foundations are for building upon, and Christian doctrine is not an end but a foundation on which we build a life in union with Christ. *Secondly, he wants to teach about Melchizedek as a biblical picture of Christ, but realizes that his readers do not really know or understand the Scriptures sufficiently to follow his argument.* He wants them to be people who are building a life of intimacy with Christ in which they are daily in God's Word, and God's Word increasingly in them, showing them new things, guiding them into new areas of obedience.*

## **2. What are we to do about it (6:1-3)?**

*We must be sure that the foundation has been laid.* As Jesus' parable reminds us, it is foolhardy to build without foundation. So we need to study and learn the basic doctrines of the faith. But, in his parable, Jesus also makes clear that it is crucial that we not merely hear, but do, the will of God

*We must press on to maturity.* How? It begins by not merely knowing about, but by actively pursuing, the ordinary biblical means of grace: daily time in the Word and prayer; commitment to a small group of Christians where we experience the reality of the body of Christ and use our gifts to help others grow in grace even as they help us grow in grace; faithful attendance with the larger community of faith as we gather weekly for worship, sing God's praises, offer our prayers and offerings, hear his Word taught, baptize people into the family of faith, eat the Lord's Supper, and go forth together into the world to love and serve the Lord.

*Then keep seeking a deeper intimacy with Christ,* through an ever more joyfully faithful obedience to his Word. The more consistently and joyfully we obey what he has revealed to us through the various means of grace, the more deeply he opens his heart and mind to us through those same means, so that we come to challenges in biblical teaching, in relationships, in obedience, things that used to merely perplex or intimidate or bore us, and now find

ourselves eager and energized to go deeper in our understanding and obedience so that we might more deeply taste and see the goodness, the presence and the power of the Lord, who created and redeemed us for this.

### **3. What happens if we do nothing (6:4-8)?**

*These verses have caused much confusion and anxiety among serious Christians. The closer we walk with Christ, the more aware we are of our own failures, the more clearly we recognize the idols and idolatries that plague us and the more we realize how quickly and easily we turn back from the joyful trust and obedience that we long to know. How can any of us not shudder at what the author writes?*

*What is he really saying? He is warning people who are weary of persecution and are tempted to renounce Christ and turn back from the faith and back from following Jesus. Does he mean that we can lose our salvation? Well, if we only had these verses, it would seem so. But since Scripture interprets Scripture, the clearer verses interpreting the more obscure, it seems that he has something else in view here. One can be enlightened, but never walk in the light. One can taste the heavenly gift, but never eat it and grow strong through it. One can share in the Holy Spirit without being filled with the Spirit, and can taste the goodness of God's Word and experience the powers of the age to come simply by being part of a community of faithful Christians, who have loved you well, prayed for you, cared for you and treated you as part of the family. Yet he may not have ever crossed from death to life. Such a one, who has now rejected Christ and renounced the faith, has in effect joined the mockers at the cross who rejected their Savior and held him up to contempt. The ordinary means of grace will not draw such a one back into the fold, although our sovereign and merciful God is still able to save. This should also serve as a serious warning to those who have secret lives of disobedience and no grief over sin or intent to renounce sin, repent and flee to Christ.*

### **4. What grounds have we for hope (6:9-12)?**

*The author does not want those who believe in Christ and desire to live a life of joyful obedience to be consumed with anxiety over what he has just written. So he quickly adds, "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation" (6:9). And he commends them for three things, things that we should seek whenever we examine ourselves for evidences of God's gracious Spirit at work in us, evidence of Christ in us: *Loving labor* done in Christ's name for one another. An *earnest longing* to know "the full assurance of hope until the end." *Energetic imitation* "of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."*

## **Conclusion**

What does that make of the popular teaching that says that sanctification (the Christian life) is simply getting used to being justified? It shows it up as a shallow trivialization of the serious call to discipleship that the Bible makes on nearly every page. What could be clearer in the light of our text but that Jesus was in blood earnest when he told his disciples that, as surely as he had to take up his cross to save us, we must take up our cross if we would know his salvation (Matthew 16:21&24) and if the world would know the great good news that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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