



Spiritual Maturity

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

1. How's Your Hearing? (verse 11)
2. How's Your Teaching? (verse 12)
3. How's Your Diet? (verses 13-14)
4. How's Your Progress? (verses 1-2)
5. Is God at Work? (verse 3)

When our oldest daughter, Carissa, was about a year old, we took her to see her great-grandpa Knoll, who was living in a retirement home in downtown San Francisco. As we walked through the retirement home, many of the residents perked up to have a gaze at the little baby that had come to grace their presence. And, as always happens in retirement communities, our child became the center and focus of attention. I remember what one man said: "If that child was smart, she would never grow up." He said this because this would cause her to be the center of attention. People, especially older people, would always look to her with admiration.

Now, of course, we know that this is silly. No parent has such a vision for their children. We aim for our children to grow and mature. We want our children to increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). We want our children to grow and be married and have children of their own. We want our children to be mature and independent.

Spiritually, the same is true of all children of God. When God saves a soul, His goal is spiritual maturity. It says in Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." In other words, God saves us to transform us to become like Jesus Christ. God's aim is to mature us to the point where we are like Him.

When Paul thought about the goals of his ministry, he said, "We proclaim [Christ] admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete [or mature] in Christ" (Col. 1:28). As a church, "we are to grow up in all aspects into Him" (Eph. 4:15). The aim of God in our conversion is "Spiritual Maturity." The aim of ministry is "Spiritual Maturity." The title of my message this morning is "Spiritual Maturity."

And so, this morning, I have five questions for you. They are questions that all aim toward your spiritual maturity. The first question comes there in verse 11, ...

1. How's Your Hearing? (verse 11)

Hebrews 5:11

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

You can hear the angst in the voice of the author. He desperately wants to tell us about Melchizedek, how he foreshadows Christ and how the priesthood of Jesus is so much more glorious than any priest up on the planet. But, he knows that his readers aren't ready for what he's about to say.

Twice in the previous paragraph, he brought up Melchizedek. And, twice he interrupts himself. Look at verse 6: "just as He says also in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6) And then, the subject changes abruptly in verse 7 to talk about Jesus. "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death" (Heb 5:7). It's as if he wanted to talk about Melchizedek, but couldn't. And then in verse 10, the same thing takes place, "being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:11). And then, he comes in verse 11, "Concerning him we have much to say" (Heb 5:11).

But he doesn't talk about Melchizedek until chapter 7. Look at chapter 6, verse 20: "where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." And then, beginning in chapter 7, he picks up the subject of Melchizedek, saying in verse 1 and 2, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace."

And in chapter 7, there is much explanation of Melchizedek. Indeed, he has "much to say" about Melchizedek. And when we get there, we will work through Melchizedek. But, now is not the time. Because, now is not the time for the writer to the book of Hebrews. There is an important matter to face: the spiritual maturity of his readers.

Look once again at verse 11, "It is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." The things of Melchizedek are "hard to explain." Admittedly, Hebrews 7 is a difficult passage. But, please notice what makes it difficult. It's not so much the content of Hebrews 7 as it is the people. It's "hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." The difficulty of Melchizedek (and Hebrews 7) is due to the ability of his

readers to hear. Notice what he says: "you have become dull of hearing."

Again, this is my first point this morning: How's Your Hearing? (verse 11). As we prepare to come to Hebrews 7, are you prepared to hear? Are you, "quick to hear" (as James 1:19) says it? Or, are you "dull of hearing."

I had a good illustration of this during the week. Early in the week, the Deans gave our children a little, portable Princess tent. It sits about four feet high on the top and has a base of about 4 feet in diameter at the bottom. On the top it is open, so that you can see inside. Well, this past Wednesday, Yvonne was busy with some things and asked me if I could put David (our 2 ½ year old) down for a nap. I said, "Sure." So, I looked throughout the house to find him. Lo and behold, he was in his room, in the Princess tent, playing with his Little People toys. I knew that, because I heard him talking to himself, like little children are wont to do when playing with toys. He was saying things like, "Bob go house. ... Not home. ... Pbbbbbbb. ... Where are you?"

As the tent has an opening in the top, I was able to observe him for about 20 seconds. All this time, he hadn't seen me enter his room. And then, as if I was a voice from heaven, I began to whisper, "David. ... David. ... David." I was trying to speak quietly enough, so that he could hear something, but not quite know where it was coming from. But, he wasn't listening. He was too intent upon his Little People toys. And so, I tried speaking louder. "David. ... David. ... David." But, still no response. Finally, I spoke loud enough so that I knew that he would hear me. "David!" He looked around, with no idea of where the sound was coming from and was quite surprised to see daddy watching his every move.

Well, How's Your Hearing? (verse 11) When God speaks, are you listening? Or, are you so busy with the things of life that you don't hear the voice of God?

Now, the idea here in this word, "dull of hearing" isn't so much a loudness, but a readiness to hear. Ready to hear; ready to obey. The idea here is that these readers were sluggish in their hearing. They were sluggish in their obedience (see Hebrews 6:12). The idea here is that they were slow to understand. Regarding spiritual matters, that's what's being addressed here. People who hear the word, but don't understand because they were "dull of hearing" or, as the NIV says, "slow to learn."

And the sad thing here is that they grew into this state. In verse 11 we read, "you have become dull of hearing." The word in the Greek text for "have become" implies that a change has taken place. See, it's not that they are dull of hearing. Rather, it's that they have become dull of hearing. At one point, they were eager listeners. They were learning well. But, then, over time, they began to be sluggish about their hearing. And now, they had come to a place where they weren't hearing very well any more.

I have seen this before. People initially are excited and thrilled with God, but then drift away with little interest. These Hebrews were initially enthused about what they heard about Jesus. But, over time, they became increasingly hardened to the things taught. They became disinterested and dull.

It's a bit like what took place at Psidian Antioch, during the first missionary journey of Paul. He arrived in the synagogue on one Sabbath and proclaimed Christ to the Jews (Acts 13:16-41). Initially, they were thrilled and the message. They "kept begging [Paul and Barnabas] that these things might be spoken to them next Sabbath" (Acts 13:42). And yet, sadly, when the time came and the entire city was gathered at the synagogue to hear Paul, the Jews were hardened, being filled with jealousy (Acts 13:44). At that point, their heart was hard. They were dull of hearing. They wouldn't hear the gospel. The Jews instigated a persecution and had Paul removed from the city.

How's your hearing? Are you slow to learn? Or, are you eager to hear God's word. Spiritual maturity is reached by being quick to hear.

My question here is this, ...

2. How's Your Teaching? (verse 12)

Hebrews 5:12

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

The idea here isn't that they all need to be official teachers in the church, who stand in front of people and proclaim the word of God to the entire congregation. This is often a matter of giftedness and calling. Nevertheless, we are all called to be teachers of God's word. Not in the official sense of the word. But, in the sense that we teach every time that we open our mouths. We are always imparting something to someone.

We are all called to be teachers to those who don't know Christ. Peter said it this way: "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Someone asks you, "Hey, how can you respond in this way to the suffering that you are facing right now?" You can respond by telling them of the hope that you have in Jesus Christ.

We are all called to be teachers to each other in the church. Paul said that the word of Christ ought always to be in our heart and upon our lips. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). In other words, the Scriptures and their message ought to be on our hearts and minds. We ought to be speaking it with others. Not teaching in a formal sense of teaching, but teaching in an everyday, every conversation sense.

We are all called to be teachers in our families. The call to Israel is the same as the call to us.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Every single one of you parents is called to be a teacher of God's word. You are called to teach your children, just like Eunice, who taught God's word to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). We are called to teach others outside the church (1 Peter 3:15). We are called to teach others inside the church (Col. 3:16). We are called to teach others inside our home (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). How's Your Teaching? (verse 12) We are all called to be teaching each others.

You can easily translate verse 12, "Yes indeed, by this time you ought to be teachers." This was the expectation of the writer to the Hebrews. He was expecting them to be teacher by the time of the writing. But, sadly, they weren't. They weren't maturing yet to this stage. Now, this begs the question: How long a time should it take for a convert to be a teacher? Well, on the one hand, it ought to happen right away. When we come to see the glorious light of the gospel of Christ, the reality ought to come out of our mouths!

Perhaps you remember when Jesus healed the Gerasene demoniac. He had lived among the tombs (Mark 5:2). He had often been "bound with shackles and chains," but somehow, always managed to get free from his bonds (Mark 5:4). He went about constantly "screaming among the tombs and in the mountains" (Mark 5:5). He was "gashing himself with stones" (Mark 5:5). And yet, in a miraculous moment, Jesus cast the Legion of demons out of the man (Mark 5:9-13). Soon afterwards, he was "clothed and in his right mind" listening to Jesus (Mark 5:15). When Jesus began to leave, he begged to be able to go with him. But, Jesus said, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). Here was a man, who was insane and out of control, and Jesus expected him to go home and be a teacher.

When David repented of his sin, in his confession he pledged, "I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You" (Ps. 51:13). The moment of repentance becomes a moment when you are called to be a teacher. God has called us to be "a people for His own possession, so that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). In other words, we are to be so thrilled at what Christ has done for our souls that we can't stop talking about it.

Doesn't it work this way: when you have learned something and are excited about it, you find that you want others to learn as well? You naturally speak about the things that have most captured your heart.

If you are into the Olympics, you know of Apolo Ohno's quest for a seventh Olympic medal. You can speak freely about the ways that Torah Bright, the Australian, won the women's half-pipe gold. You can tell of how the arrogant Norwegian cross country skier, Petter Northug flopped in the 15k, finishing 41st, but came back to earn the bronze in the individual sprint. You know that women's hockey won their opening round 13-0 over the Russian federation. You know how the Chinese figure skaters came back from a devastating crash four years ago to take the gold. You know that the Canadian women's curling team is undefeated and working their way toward gold. You know much more. When talking with people, you are eager and willing to freely share your knowledge of what you have seen. The same is true in the Christian life.

The more you know about your salvation, the more you will freely speak about it to others, in effect teaching them what you have learned. How's Your Teaching? (verse 12) Do you freely speak with others about Christ and the things that you are learning in the Bible? Or, are you mostly silent in spiritual matters? What goes in will come out.

Now, the sad reality here of those who originally received these words is that they weren't teachers. Instead, they needed someone to teach them again of the elementary principles of the faith. It's like they never got past kindergarten. Kindergarten was too tough for them. As each year rolled around, they again entered into kindergarten. How painful would that be? And yet, this is the spiritual reality of many. There are many who only learn their ABC's in the church year after year after year. The writer calls this here, "the elementary principles of the oracles of God."

You say, "what exactly are these 'elementary principles'?" Let's wait on that question, as it comes up in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. Instead, let's move onto our third point this morning.

3. How's Your Diet? (verses 13-14)

Beginning in the last half of verse 12, we read, ...

Hebrews 5:12-14

"...you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

When I ask my 2½ year old son, "David, are you a baby?" he says, "No." If I say, "David, I think that you are a baby." He says "No." He hates being called a baby. He wants to be called a little boy, not a baby. I'm not sure that any child likes being called a baby. They want to grow up. They don't want to be babies. They want to be boys and girls.

I think that the same is true of adults as well. We don't like being called little children. But, that's exactly what the writer to the Hebrews is saying here. He's saying that you are like infants, who need to be spoon fed everything.

Looking at the text, we notice a clear metaphor being used here at the end of verse 12. It's the metaphor of food. He brings up milk and solid food. He says, "you have come to need milk and not solid food." You all know this! It's much easier to digest milk than it is to digest solid food. With solid food, you need to work a bit to get it digested. You need to chew it. And then, your stomach needs to work to break it down. But, solid food is necessary in order to grow into maturity.

As infants, we began our lives drinking only milk. But, as we grew older, we began taking in solid food into our systems. Spiritually speaking, there are some things that are like milk, which require little work to digest: fluffy devotionals, easy and short sermons, inspirational stories, simple application. Spiritually speaking, there are some things that are like solid food, which require a bit more work to digest: doctrinal studies, stronger sermons, studies of particular books of the Bible, challenging application.

The great reality is this: you can't live your Christian life on milk alone. Now, there is nothing wrong with milk. It nourishes an infant. It helps a baby to grow. It even provides nutritional value for adults. But, you can't live on milk alone. That's the point of verse 13, where the metaphor is applied to life, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant."

There are spiritual babies, who take in only milk. As a result, they are not used to the "word of righteousness." It's detestable to them. Have you ever seen a child tasting solid food for the first time? I remember the times in which our children were fed rice cereal for the first time. They often didn't quite know what to do with it. At first, they had a look of surprise on their faces, "Hey, what's this you have put in my mouth? I've never tasted this before." Usually, much of it doesn't get swallowed, because they haven't learned how to bring the rice cereal into the back of their throat. On some occasions, they have spit it back out, not wanting it at all.

That's the picture given here in this verse. A spiritual babe hears "the word of righteousness," and doesn't really know what to do with it. It's strange to him. He hasn't really tasted it before. Much of it never gets into him. Why? Because he is "not accustomed" to it. (verse 13). He is an infant. He doesn't like it.

There are many professing Christians, who can only endure milk. When they hear solid food, they have no interest. They are like Peter Pan, who sang, "I won't grow up. ... I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up. Not me! Not I. Not me! Not me! I won't grow up!"

This begins to get at the idea of our text. The author wants to go deeper into the things of Christ, telling of how His priesthood is more glorious than the Levitical priests, explaining that the priesthood of Melchizedek is far better than that of the priesthood of the Levitical system (Heb. 7:11). He wants to tell of how Melchizedek was a priest forever, and so is Christ! But, he fears that he can't delve into these things because of the spiritual state of the readers, who are accustomed only to milk. He wants to get into the solid food, which is for the mature.

In verse 14 we read, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." The mature are those who have stretched themselves to understand. They have trained themselves, just as any Olympic athlete has done. They have placed themselves in difficult circumstances, where they have been forced to grow and mature. And thus, they have come to know and understand the weightier matters of the things of God. And the question rightly comes to you, how's your diet? (verses 13-14)

When you reflect upon the things that you have eaten spiritually in the past week, how does it fair? Have you only been drinking milk? Or, have you had some solid food this week? What have you read this past week? What have you listened to this past week? Did you read your Bible this week? Did you read any substantial books this week? Did you listen to any solid teaching this week? Did you listen? Have you turned around and taught it to someone else?

My heart aches this morning, because I know that there are some of you here this morning who never picked up your Bible this week. There are some of you here this morning who took in nothing of God this week. There are some of you here this morning who didn't even drink any milk this week, and you wonder why you are stagnant in your Christian life. Paul told those in Corinth (using the same metaphor), ...

1 Corinthians 3:1-3a

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly.

The way of growth is to drink the milk. The way of growth is to eat the solid food. But, please notice here that the author isn't talking primarily about doctrinal discernment. Rather, he's talking about moral discernment. The mature can discern "good and evil." It doesn't say that the mature can discern "truth and error," because fundamentally, the issue here with the Hebrews isn't an academic problem. It's a moral problem like those in Corinth who were fleshly.

There are plenty of theologians who know the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible. They are schooled in the matters of historical theology. They can tell you all of the arguments. They can tell you what each book of the Bible is about. They can tell you the claims of Christ. But, when it comes down to it, they can't grasp what's right and wrong. And there are plenty of simple folk, who work hard for a living. They are by no means scholars. But, they have embraced the realities of Christ, and can spot good and evil a mile away. They can easily discern when others have been walking the wrong track.

The original readers were in danger of being the former, not discerning the treasures of Christ. They were waffling, thinking of trusting again in their religious works, going back again into the ways of Judaism. Fundamentally, they had not made progress in their faith, which leads us to our next point.

I have asked you to examine your hearing (verse 11), your teaching (verse 12), your diet (verses 13-14), and now, fourthly, ...

4. How's Your Progress? (verses 1-2)

I've heard it said many times before that you either press forward in your Christian life, or you slip backwards. There isn't any middle ground. You can't stand still. We are like trees, which either grow or die. The call of chapter 6, verses 1 and 2 is a call for growth. It's a call for progress in the faith.

We read, ...

Hebrews 6:1-2

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

The call here is to "press on to maturity." It's a call beyond being merely milk drinkers. It is a part of the theme of Hebrews, "Jesus Is Better, So Press On!" In verses 1 and 2, the writer is saying that there are some elementary things of the faith that must be resolved in your mind and left behind. And leaving them behind, we are called to press on to maturity.

In verses 1 and 2, we have a list of six things that we are called to leave behind. We have six things, which are milk (Heb. 5:12). We have six things, which are the "elementary principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:13).

- a. Repentance from dead works (verse 1).
- b. Faith toward God (verse 1).
- c. Washings (verse 2).
- d. Laying on of hands (verse 2).
- e. The resurrection of the dead (verse 2).
- f. Eternal judgment (verse 2).

Here's the thing, the original readers never quite resolved these issues in their minds. They came back to them again and again and again. They said, "Now, tell us about the washings again." Or, they said, "We need help understanding the laying on of hands." Or, they said, "Can you show us again, how exactly the resurrection fits into the picture?" But, we are called to leave these things behind (not in the sense that they aren't important—they are very important—but, in the sense that we have embraced them and gone onwards. We drink the milk. We believe these things and embrace these things. But, we don't live on these things. We press on beyond them. Let's look at them individually.

a. Repentance from dead works (verse 1).

In the original context, I believe that these words had reference to the dead works of Judaism: the washings, the ceremonies, the sacrifices, the holy days. Those are dead works, which, in and of themselves, do nothing. They are shadows pointing us to the work of Christ.

There just might be some dead works in your life that you need to turn from and renounce. Things which point you to Jesus, but you have held fast to the form, and not the substance. Like traditions of prayers that you always say. Like traditions of religious activities you feel like you need to have. Perhaps, even, there are some evil deeds that you need to repent from.

b. Faith toward God (verse 1).

The issue here for the original readers was the belief in God and His word. They had not resolved in their hearts whether or not they believed God, that Christ was the perfect revelation of God, that God was really satisfied in the sacrifice of His Son. The call is to settle this once and for all. Believe in God.

For us, the same call comes. Have you resolved in your heart that you believe in God? Have you trusted in Christ? There is a brand of Christianity that's always in the state of limbo. People are always searching themselves, asking "Do I believe in God, or not? Have I repented of my sins or not?" They ask these questions, because they don't find any fruit in their lives. And so, they rededicate their lives just to make sure.

Then, another six months later, they are in the same predicament. "Do I believe in God, or not? Have I repented of my sins or not?" And so, they rededicate their lives, just to make sure. Such people will always remain in a state of spiritual infancy. They won't press on to maturity.

The text here is calling us to move on from this sort of thing. Resolve it now. Trust in Christ. Trust in God. And, press on beyond these things.

c. Washings (verse 2).

These words may be referring to the various purification ceremonies that these Jews were used to. These Jews had grown up washing themselves for everything. They ceremonially washed their hands before they ate (Mark 7:4). They washed themselves before coming to the temple. The writer here is saying, leave those things behind. You don't have to take a

bath before coming to church. The true cleansing comes from inside. We are made clean through the sacrifice of Jesus, not through any rites of washing and cleansing. It is through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all, that we are cleansed from our sins (Heb 10:10). Somehow, they didn't grasp how we are made clean.

Perhaps these words have reference to New Testament "baptisms." Indeed, this is the Greek word, *baptismwn* (baptism). Perhaps their questions came along this line, "Do we need to be continually washed as well? First, John came baptizing. Do we need to do this? Then, the disciples of Jesus baptized. What's this about? Since that day, there has been Christian baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Is this the baptism we need? What about Spirit baptism? How do these washings work with faith in Christ?" They never realized that each of these things are all to be experienced only once. They aren't to be repeated again and again and again.

It's like they never got beyond the simple understanding of these things. The writer is telling us to press on beyond these things and don't bother with the questions over and over and over again.

d. Laying on of hands (verse 2).

In the Old Covenant, there were rituals of laying on of hands. Mostly by priests, who would lay their hands upon the animal about to be sacrificed (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 16:21, etc.). Such a ritual was symbolic of transferring sins to the animal. But, in the New Covenant, no such rituals took place. We don't lay hands upon Jesus. It's impossible. He's in heaven now. Yet, it's by faith that we believe in Him

In the New Testament, there are various instances in which people laid hands upon another. They laid hands upon church leaders. Like those who were chosen to help the apostles in the serving of tables (Acts 6:6). Like upon Timothy in his ordination (1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). But, they also laid hands upon new converts, that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). As the Jews were always looking for signs, I suspect that there were those in the community who were interested in how this worked and what this meant. Were they lacking in spiritual power because nobody had laid hands upon them?

Again, the call is to go beyond seeking something else in your spiritual experience. You merely need to believe in Christ. You don't need to seek any extra spiritual power. So get beyond these things.

e. The resurrection of the dead (verse 2).

It's not surprising that the Jews of the first century had difficulties with the resurrection. You search the Old Testament, and there are only a few references made to the resurrection. But, there are some, like Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53. Furthermore, the whole idea of a king upon the throne of David forever begs the belief in the resurrection (Ps 89).

The Pharisees and Sadducees were divided over the issue. The Sadducees said that there was no resurrection (Matt. 22:23). But, the Pharisees held to a resurrection. And the early Jewish Christians were likely confused at the point. Those in Corinth were confused (i.e. 1 Cor. 15). But, the writer here says that the resurrection is a simple, straightforward doctrine that must be embraced. Jesus raised from the dead. So too may we anticipate our resurrection from the dead when Jesus returns.

The resurrection isn't something that we need to continually go back to again and again and again to try to understand. We will live again!

f. Eternal judgment (verse 2).

Again, it's not surprising that there would be debate and difficulty of hearing over this as well. The Jews had a very temporal look at life. They didn't think much of the afterlife. With no resurrection, there would be no judgment. But, with the resurrection, there would be judgment!

Resolve it now in your mind. Jesus said, ...

Matthew 25:31-33, 46

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ... [The goats] will go away into eternal punishment, but the [sheep] into eternal life.

Resolve it now in your mind. There is a judgment that will have eternal consequences. You will live with Christ forever. Or, you will live apart from Him in the terrors of hell forever. This isn't the sort of thing that you should need to go over again and again and again in your mind. It's true. Accept it. Believe it. Press on to maturity.

So, How's Your Progress? (verses 1-2) Are these six things a question for you? Or, have you resolved them in your heart. Can you say, "I

have repented of my sins and all my righteous and wicked deeds. I know and believe that Christ has brought me to God. It's not by external washings or laying on of hands that justifies me. I'm looking forward to the resurrection. I trust that because of my faith in Christ, I will stand justified at the judgment." Can you say that? If you can't, I would recommend that you resolve these things in your mind and "press on to maturity."

But, I have one last point.
5. Is God at Work? (verse 3)

Look at verse 3, "And this we will do (i.e. press on to maturity), if God permits." This couches the entire section in the sovereignty of God. See, you can't merely say, "Wow, I'm dull of hearing. I'm going to start listening to God and His word with more attentiveness," and go do it on your own strength. You can't say, "I'm going to make God's word (and what I'm learning) the topic of my conversations from now on," and go do it on your own strength. You can't say, "That's it. I'm resolved to begin eating the meat of the word," and then go do it on your own strength. You can't say, "I'm going to set the foundational things aside and press on," and then go on to do it in your own strength.

God must be at work for any of these things to happen. "And this we will do, if God permits."

For any of you who watched or read of the public confession of Tiger Woods this past week, you may have noticed that he said that he was sorry over and over again, which is good. You may also have noticed how often he claimed that the power was in him to reform. He said:

It's now up to me to make amends. ... It's up to me to start living a life of integrity. ... I know above all I am the one who needs to change. I owe it to my family to become a better person. I owe it to those closest to me to become a better man. That's where my focus will be. ... I will continue to receive help because I've learned that's how people really do change. Starting tomorrow, I will leave for more treatment and more therapy. ... Today, I want to ask for your help. I ask you to find room in your heart to one day believe in me again.

I appreciate his attempts to change. I hope that he does. But, his approach is all wrong. His hopes of changing lie all within himself. But, Hebrews 6:3 points out that our change doesn't come from ourselves. It comes from God.

Our hearing will only be good if God permits. Our teaching will only take place if God permits. Our diet will only consist of solid food if God permits. Our progress will only take place if God permits.

I close with one final story. In recent days, we have configured one of our computers so as to be able to watch television in our home. As a family, we have enjoyed watching some of the Olympic games on our laptop. It's really quite amazing that we can carry our television all around our home and watch without a cord attached to the wall. The signal comes through Wi-Fi and the power comes from the battery.

Well, last night as Yvonne and I went to bed, we spent a few moments watching the Olympic games. I commented to Yvonne how amazing it was that we were watching television on our laptop. I told her how convenient it was. I told her how nice it was. Any way, we were watching Apolo Ohno racing on the short track. He was seeking to obtain a seventh Olympic medal, an American record.

After a few races, I told Yvonne, "We need to wait until Apolo Ohno races this last race. If he is in the top two, he goes to the finals. Let's watch this one last race and then go to bed." The race was 9 laps around the short track. It would be over in about a minute and a half. We saw the start of the race. As is typical of Apolo's style, he started off in third place. After a few laps, he jumped into second place. And then ... the battery went out on our laptop. The screen before us went black. Just 30 seconds more, and we would have seen the end of the race.

I thought, how appropriate it was to our text this morning. We might make our plans. But, God directs our steps (Prov 16:9). We had planned to watch the race and then go to sleep. But, God had other plans. He stopped us short. Without a power cord, it was impossible for us to watch the end of the race.

Such may be the case with your life. This morning, you may be thinking, "Just a few more months, and then I'll seek my spiritual maturity." Be warned. Our section next week says that you may reach a point where it is impossible for God to renew you again to repentance. Resolve today to seek Him and His help to become spiritually mature. May God permit us to do so.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 21, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
