

## “The Cost of Immaturity” – Hebrews 5:11-6:3

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take your Bible and meet me in Hebrews 5...

My son and I had to have a bit of a heart to heart this week. This is how it began. “Son, you’re seven. You’re growing up fast. You’re in second grade now. So I think its time for you to learn to tie your shoes...” Some of you are judging me right now. I can feel your condescension and judgey attitude. You’re thinking, “You waited seven years to teach your kid how to tie his shoes?” No. Actually, I didn’t. In fact, I’ve lost count how many times I’ve taught him how to tie his shoes. I’ve seen his sisters give him lessons. His mother has taken the knee and offered instruction. Strange women in the stores have offered to mentor him in the ways of the shoelace. And I’ve even seen him tie his shoe. But every time he “learns,” he seems to forget by the next day. He tucks the laces in or ponies up to some sucker who will tie them for him when he puts on a sad face...

Now my son is a bright kid. He’s pretty sharp in a lot of areas of his life. He’s ahead of many of his peers in some areas. There is no learning disability or dexterity issue that’s keeping him from catching on. He’s just lazy. Either that or I’m just a really bad teacher. But I think in this case he’s just lazy. He doesn’t want to learn bad enough yet. He hasn’t experienced the social pressure to grow up yet in that area of his life. I’m hoping that will change. But until then we have to keep rehearsing the same old “Make a bunny ear...now over and under, around and through...”

Our text this morning reminds me of that conversation I had with my son again this week. The writer of Hebrews just interrupts the flow of his teaching and voices a little frustration. “Do we really need to go over how to tie your shoes again?” That’s what he seems to be saying. Shouldn’t we be able to move on to other things yet? In many ways this text is very relevant for our time because what he is observing in his audience is characteristic of the church of this age. You’ll see what I mean as we go along...

Hopefully, you’ve found your way to Hebrews, chapter 5. I’ll pick up where we left off in verse 11. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

*“About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. **6** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.” (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)*

We are going to consider these verses this week and next. They obviously have to do with the spiritual immaturity of the audience. They have not grown up. They haven’t been made ready for the deeper teaching that the author wants to pass on to them.

This isn't because they are new believers (that would be understandable). And this isn't because the new teaching is particularly difficult to understand, but because they have not been listening properly to previous teachings. They are culpable of their ignorance. They're not held back by some sort of cognitive impairment or learning disability. If they were, the writer would not have addressed them like this. He comes at them directly because they're just lazy. They're at fault for their own immaturity. I'll show you why that is the case next week. And we will also see next week, Lord willing, the cause of their immaturity and solution for growing out of their immaturity, as the writer describes them.

Today, however, we have a different objective. What I would like for us to see in God's Word this morning is the cost of such immaturity. When Christians refuse to "grow up" it is detrimental to them and to others. How so? Let's find out. First of all, consider with me how...

### **Immaturity Is Detrimental to YOU**

Notice how the author voices his frustration in verse 11. *"About this we have much to say and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."* He wants to show them some amazing things about Melchizedek and his relationship to Jesus, but he feels like his readers aren't ready for what he has to say. He feels like they *"need someone to teach [them] again the basic principles"* of the faith, when by now they should be teaching such things to others (5:12). He wants to move on to deeper waters, but they need to retake last year's class because they've lost their grasp on even the basics. They have not been growing. If anything, they have been regressing. And the writer of Hebrews laments that fact because he knows they are missing out on so much more because they have refused to grow up. They have grown content with the bottle, when there awaits for them a steak dinner that is so much more satisfying.

So the first reason Christian immaturity is so tragic is because it cuts you off from so much that God's Word has to offer. The immature don't know what they're missing. When a baby is used to a bottle he resists solid food. But once a baby is weaned from the bottle, he doesn't want to go back. Never in my life have I ever sat down for a nice meal (or even a not so nice one) and thought, "You know what I really miss? Baby formula." It's never happened. And it never will. That milk had its purpose. I wouldn't be who I am today without it. But I've grown up now and there's no turning back.

How strange it is though, from the writer's perspective, that his audience should by now have grown up spiritually to dine of the fillet of God's Word and even prepare food to serve others, but they come to the table in a bib and diaper, saying, "I'll have one bottle on the house....And then a nap please." And the writer of Hebrews is like, "Come on, man! It's time to grow up! Something ain't right here! There is so much more that I want you to taste and see, but you've got to get these basics down first. You have no excuse. It's time to wipe the drool from your face and make some progress. It's not cute anymore. It's just weird!"

When we don't progress in our faith, we leave on the table so much that the Word of God has to offer. Jesus made this same point in the "Parable of the Sower."

*"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup> And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup> And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.' As he said these things, he called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"* (Luke 8:4-8)

The disciples ask Him what the meaning of the parable is and Jesus goes on to explain how the seed represents the Word of God and the various soils stand for the condition of the hearts that encounter the Word of God. The seed only takes root in the heart soil that has been prepared to receive it and in that soil it produces fruit. Then Jesus shifts the metaphor to light.

*“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. <sup>17</sup> For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”* (Luke 8:16-17)

When we receive God’s revelation, the light, then we are not meant to hide it from the world, but to share it with others. Jesus, like the writer of Hebrews, is concerned that we hear, heed, and proclaim the truth of God’s Word. That we not be “*dull of hearing*” because by now we “*ought to be teachers*” (Hebrews 5:11-12). Receiving the Word rightly and passing it along faithfully. Then Jesus says this...

*“Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”* (Luke 8:18)

In the context what one has been “given” is the Word of God (i.e., the seed, the light), not wealth and possessions. So what is Jesus saying here? One commentary explains it like this:

*“The person who has listened carefully to God’s word will understand it even more clearly, but the person who does not pay heed to how he or she hears God’s word will lose even that which they think they know. Careful hearing, i.e., heeding, results in greater understanding of God’s revealed word; careless hearing, i.e., a lack of heeding, results in the loss of what has been heard.”<sup>1</sup>*

Is that not what the writer of Hebrews seems to be suggesting? “I want to tell you guys more about the beauty of Christ’s priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, but it’s hard to explain because you’re just so dull of hearing. There’s more for you to hear, but it’s for those who hear and heed what’s already been given. There’s meat, but you still need milk. Drink the milk. Get the basic principles down. Take care how you hear, because if you can get that down, more will be given.” The writer’s going, “I’ve got more to give! But it’s hard because you seem to be losing what has been given to you. You’re not hearing. You’re not heeding. You’re not teaching. You’re not growing. You’re regressing!” The old adage is true, “If you don’t use it, you lose it.” They haven’t been using what has been revealed to them, so they’re losing it.<sup>2</sup> They are in danger of forfeiting it and all the rest that has been offered to them.

You pay a price, friends, for spiritual immaturity. You miss out on the feast that God’s Word offers. It’s time to grow up. It’s time to listen to the Word more attentively and put it into practice. Do this and you will receive more that God’s Word has to offer than you have ever dreamed! There is so much more that God has to offer you in His Word, but you’ve got to get your spiritual ABCs down first. It’s time to grow up in your faith. It’s not cute any more. And it’s not too late. There’s much to be gained in your personal life, if by God’s grace you go the way of Christian maturity. Be a good steward with what God has given and He will open your mind to even more.

But the individual is not the only one who suffers for their spiritual immaturity. We like to think that our decisions only affect us, but we should know by now that’s not the case. And the writer of Hebrews here reminds us, second, that...

### **Immaturity Is Detrimental to OTHERS**

Look again at the scathing rebuke of verse 12—“*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.*” They need to enroll in Christianity 101, when by now they should be teaching the class. So their immaturity is affecting more than just themselves. It’s robbing others.

If you’ve been here for a while, then you have heard me say that the Gospel has come to you because it was heading for someone else. Christians are recipients of the Good News not merely for their own good, but for the good of others. The problem is that our tendency to see ourselves at the center of everything makes it easier for us to give no thought to how our spiritual immaturity is robbing others in the community and in the world. If we are not maturing, we are making it harder for others to mature as well.

At Southern Oaks our mission statement is very simple and you can find it in the bulletin: “We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives.” How will we do that? What’s our plan? By actively embracing what we call “the 3 GCs”—Gospel-Centrality (i.e., keeping the Gospel at the center of everything we do), the Great Commandments (i.e., loving God and neighbor), and the Great Commission (i.e., making disciples).

That last one, the Great Commission, represents the call that Jesus has placed on all of His followers. Jesus said,

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-21)

There is one command there: Make disciples! Everything else is commentary on that command. Why do we make disciples? Because Christ is Lord and His authority allows Him to command what He wills and give what He commands and He has commanded us to make disciples. How do we make disciples? By going to the nations, baptizing those who receive the Gospel through faith, and teaching them everything that Jesus passed on to us. That’s what discipleship looks like.

Let me tell you what it doesn’t look like. It doesn’t look like coming to church, nodding your head when someone says something about the importance of the Great Commission, and throwing some coin in the offering plate when we have an offering. Those things may be an application of the Great Commission in your life, but they ought not be the sum total of it. If that’s your idea of a Great Commission Christian, then you’ve got a lot to learn about following Christ. That’s not what we mean when we say we want to be a church that actively embraces the Great Commission.

A Christian who actively embraces the Great Commission is one who can answer two questions—“Who is discipling me?” and “Who am I discipling?” Can you answer those questions? If not, then what makes you think that you are applying the Great Commission. If the Great Commission is for all Christ followers to engage in and the Great Commission involves teaching, then who are you teaching? “Well, you don’t understand, pastor, I just don’t have the gift of teaching and I don’t know a lot about the Bible.” Fair enough. Let me ask you this: Are you a Christian? Then you have something to teach. You can’t be a Christian without understanding the basic Gospel and if you understand that then there is someone around you who really needs to have you explain it. So teach them!

Christians, the Gospel came to you because it was heading for someone else. Once upon a time, someone came along in your life who helped you understand that you were a sinner, separated from God and in danger of hell, who needed a Savior. They told you that salvation is possible, but not through anything you

can do, only through the work of another, a Savior, Jesus Christ. God sent His Son to our world, He took on our humanity, lived a perfect life, offered Himself up as our substitute on the cross, absorbed the wrath of God that we deserved, and rose again three days later. God the Father accepted the payment of Christ's blood as an atonement for our sins. We can be forgiven, in other words, and have a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ—turning from the shame of sin and trusting in Christ alone as our hope. Through no effort of your own, you were saved freely, graciously, fully, eternally. You were adopted into God's family. Your life has been forever changed and that's why it's your joy now to follow Christ, imperfectly, yes, but confidently because your standing with God is built upon His performance, not yours. That's the Gospel.

God sent someone to you with that good news. You believed. Now you have been sent with that good news to others. At the very least, as a Christian, you should be able to teach that to someone. I was a sinner. I deserved hell. Jesus came to save me. He died on the cross. He rose from the dead. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the work of Christ alone. If you're a Christian, you get that. And you were meant to share that. Pass on what you know from God's Word and guess what? You'll receive new insights into God's Word and His Gospel, as you mature, and you'll have more to give, more to teach. To the one who has, more will be given.

But you can't teach what you don't got, hence the reason the writer of Hebrews is so frustrated. How many times do they need to be taught the basic principles? How many times until they stick? How long until we can move on, not *from* the Gospel, but *deeper into* the Gospel? That's his point. When are you going to put in practice what you've receive? How long have you been here? Shouldn't you be teaching by now? There's some sarcasm in the authors voice, isn't there?

So let me ask you this: Would he have said the same thing to us? To you? Who are you teaching? Who are you passing on the Gospel truth that you have received, understood, embraced, and applied to? How long has it been since you have believed? Have you grown up yet? Are you teaching others yet? Are you ready for meat? Or do you still need milk?

He doesn't seem to envision any excuse that would justify why His audience has not matured. He doesn't seem to allow for any reasonable explanation for why they shouldn't be teaching by now. And if that's not characteristic of our age, I'm not sure what is. The Western Church is full of grown men and women who have been in the church for decades who are still on the bottle. Tantrums, maybe. Teaching, not so much. They have been in church for years, decades even, and they still think, "Teaching? Isn't that your job pastor?" And their pastors are thinking, "There is so much more I want to show you here in God's Word, there so much here to nourish your soul and build your spiritual muscle, but let me clean out the bottle and heat up the milk again." Why is this so?

A few years ago, Robby Gallaty released a helpful book called *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. I remember when I picked up the book and scanned the table of contents, there was one chapter that immediately grabbed my attention. The chapter was titled, "A Comma That May Have Kept the Church in a Discipleship Coma." He had me at "comma." And he wasn't even referring to the Oxford Comma. O' how I love the Oxford Comma. But I digress...

For example, there is a big difference between these two statements:

"Let's eat, Grandpa!"

"Let's eat Grandpa!"

Punctuation matters. Amen, Grandpa? A single comma could change the fate of Grandpa. So I think we all can agree, punctuation matters!

In the chapter I mentioned, Gallaty argues that while “the chasm between clergy and the laity has been narrowing since the [Protestant] Reformation five hundred years ago...it has not narrowed enough” and this “may be due to the influence of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, if you have ever taken the Interpreting the Bible class we offer every so often, then you know my thoughts on the King James Version of the Bible. I’m strongly convinced that there has never been a more important English translation of Scripture in the history of the world and there never will be. I thank God for it and how God has worked through it. And I would never recommend it to anyone today as their primary copy of God’s Word. There are a number of reasons for this, the main ones having to do with the manuscript evidence that it doesn’t take into account (through no fault of its own) and the archaic English that people struggle to understand unless you grew up on it. And, for what it is worth, I think the original translators of the KJV would agree with me, since they say as much in the preface of the original version. They encouraged the creation of new translations as needed and anticipated the vitriol of those who resist the creation of new translations.

If you go and buy a copy of the KJV off the shelf of a local bookstore, you are in all likelihood not even purchasing the original 1611 edition. You are buying what is known as the Oxford Standard Edition, produced in 1769 (more than 150 years after the original) by Benjamin Blayney, which has a mere 75,000 plus differences from the original, 1611 King James Version. File that under the “Things that King-James-Only-Pastor forgot to mention” folder in your memory bank... There have been a few updates here and there since then, but Blayney’s edition is essentially what most people think of when they think of the King James Version.

Again, I love the King James Version. It’s an excellent translation as far as it goes. There is not an English version that can rival the beauty of its prose. But the evolution of the English language has rendered it much less useful four hundred years later. It’s not the English my kids can read because it’s not the English we speak. That’s all I’m saying. But let’s get back on track...

What does all this have to do with punctuation and discipleship? Gallaty argues that the KJV translation of Ephesians 4:11-13 had some unintended and far-reaching consequences. It reads as follows:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; <sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, [COMMA] for the work of the ministry, [COMMA] for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13; KJV)

Now, based on that reading, what is the job of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? There seems to be a threefold responsibility:

1. To perfect the saints...
2. To do the work of the ministry...
3. To edify the body of Christ...

This would suggest that the ministers, pastors, and trained professionals of our day are the ones expected to carry out these ministerial duties within the church. This just so happens to be how many (perhaps most) people involved in churches today view their church leadership. The average parent today seems to

believe that it is the responsibility of the church leaders to pass on the things of God to their kids. It's not. At least not primarily. But we have delegated the responsibility to the "professionals" and we may have even thought that Ephesians 4 endorsed the decision...

Larry Osborne calls this "the Holy Man Myth." He writes,

"The Holy Man Myth' is the idea that pastors and clergy somehow have a more direct line to God. It cripples a church because it overburdens pastors and underutilizes the gifts and anointing of everyone else. It mistakenly equates leadership gifts with superior spirituality."<sup>4</sup>

To buy into that myth is to accept a paradigm that paralyzes people in the pews and robs the congregation of ministerial blessings. Why? Because we have, perhaps unconsciously, adopted the position that "meat" is for the professionals and "milk" is for the rest of us. The average church goer doesn't really need to know the Bible all that well because they are not the ones who have to pass along it's teaching. We're not the teachers. That's the job of the seminarians. It requires a pulpit or podium. That's why we hire the staff. That's why we enlist the "gifted." That's why we can blame everyone but ourselves when our kids fall away from the faith one day. And that's why modern day churches are full of Christians who, to borrow the image of Hebrews 5, have never stopped sucking on the bottle. The writer of Hebrews would say to us, "*by this time you ought to be teachers,*" and we assume that he's talking to someone else. "That's not our job. That's their job. That's what Paul was getting at in Ephesians 4, right?" Wrong.

Those of you who have studied Greek in school know this, the Greek documents that stand behind your English New Testament did not have punctuation marks. So where do the commas (or periods, or question marks, or colons, or quotation marks, etc.) come from? The translators. The punctuation is based on the judgment of the translators. And, as we've seen, punctuation matters. Gallaty is convinced that the comma placements in Ephesians 4 "may be largely to blame for the discipleship coma of the church for the past four hundred years."<sup>5</sup> He may be right.

The vast majority of modern English translations have ditched the comma placement of King James Version (and rightly so). Here's how the English Standard Version (the translation I usually preach from) renders those same verses:

*"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints [NO COMMA] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:11-13; ESV)

What a different a comma makes (or the absence of a comma in this case)! Gallaty writes,

"Notice how this changes the flow of the passage. The job of pastors, mentors, and leaders is not to do the work of ministry or build up the body as something apart from the equipping of the saints. It is the job of pastors and leaders to equip believers to carry out *their* God-given ministry. The effectiveness of a pastor is not gauged by the performance of his ministerial duties alone, but by how well they develop other disciples, preachers, pastors, godly fathers, and Christ-honoring students."<sup>6</sup>

Does that make sense? Paul was not saying that it's the job of a select group of gifted individuals—people who hold offices like apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher—to do the work of ministry. He was saying that God gifts those individuals in order to equip all the saints to do "*the work of ministry.*" Ministry is not for professionals. Ministry is for Christians. All of them. "To put it simply: Ministry is the

pathway to maturity, not the other way around.”<sup>7</sup> And we should be growing. We need milk. But we don’t perpetually need milk. Eventually we need meat and if we haven’t learned to enjoy a good steak then perhaps something is not as it should be in our lives.

So how much do you relate to the original audience of Hebrews? Are you willing to confess that you have not been a good enough steward with the opportunities to grow in God’s Word? Are you willing to admit that you have not always been as attentive to the Word of God and it’s proclamation as you ought? Do you feel as though God is sitting you down, like I sat down my son this week, and saying, “I love you child. But it’s time to grow up. It’s time to press on to maturity.” Good. Me too!

Here’s what we’ll look at next week. What does the writer of Hebrews teach us about the cause of the spiritual immaturity of his audience and what can we learn from his diagnosis? And, second, what is the solution he prescribes for them and how can we adopt it? We jumped around a bit today. That’s not our norm. Next week we will examine the rest of the passage and some other things we’ve yet to consider even from verses 11 and 12. I hope you’ll be in attendance, listening attentively. I feel like the writer of Hebrews up here—“*About this we have much to say...*”

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 249.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “By This Time You Ought to Be Teachers,” preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on September 29, 1996, and accessed through <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/by-this-time-you-ought-to-be-teachers>.

<sup>3</sup> Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus’ Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 118.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49. Also cited in Gallaty, 120.

<sup>5</sup> Gallaty, 120.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*