

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹² *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!* ¹³ *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.* ¹⁴ *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

^{6:1} *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so. (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)*

Are You Mature?

“You’re so immature.” Have you ever heard that? It’s the kind of thing teenage girls say to teenage boys who are, perhaps, doing something that embarrasses those girls. “You’re so immature.” And of course, the subtext is, “And I’m not, so grow up!” Mature means grown up. Physically, some of us might feel just a little too mature. But that’s not the only way we grow up. We also mature emotionally and intellectually. We grow in our understanding of how life works. And we grow in the way we deal with life. Do all those things happen at once? To put it another way, do you know adults who act like children when things go badly? Emotional maturity does not automatically come with a grown up body. In the same way, reaching adulthood does not mean you always understand how the world works. Just as we need to grow up physically, intellectually and emotionally, we also need to grow up spiritually. Physical maturity is no measure of spiritual maturity. Jesus told us to have the faith of little children. My friends, **are you mature?**

I.

What would that mean? What test determines if we’re spiritually mature? The book of Hebrews offers two and the first one is simple: being able to teach the faith. Now, the issue is not communication skills. It’s about having the depth of knowledge to teach what God says. **Are you mature? Can you teach the faith?**

Well, maybe you’re thinking to yourself, “No and it’s not my job.” And it’s true. God did not call most of you to be pastors or teachers or Sunday school teachers. But listen to what his word says, **“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”**

Do you see what the writer’s getting at? He was talking about Jesus as our high priest – how he came down here and endured all temptation to save us and to help us in our life of faith. But he couldn’t explore that theme with the original readers because they were “slow to learn.” The Greek word implies laziness. By this time in their faith, they ought to have been teachers. They ought to have had a mature understanding of the work of Christ and the ability to explain it, whether they actually stood in a classroom or not. But they couldn’t. They needed someone to go back and explain the basics to them because they didn’t have them down. Without the basics, they couldn’t go on.

So I ask you again, my friends, are you mature? Can you teach the faith? God has called all of us to do that. God has called us parents to teach our children the faith. Do we spend the same effort on that as we spend on their grades or their ability to get along with other kids? If you know that you have not given the same attention to teaching your child to grow in his knowledge of Christ as you have spent on teaching them to play football or to do math or to deal with conflicts in school, then my friends, you are not mature in your faith. You should be teachers by now, at least of your own children. Are you?

If you’re not, why not? I know everybody’s busy and it’s hard to make time. But is that the real issue? Or are you one of those people that doesn’t know the message of the gospel well enough to teach it to your own children? Are you afraid of the questions they will ask? That’s a real fear. If it’s true that you don’t know the message of the gospel well enough to explain to your own children, then I think what God is saying here does apply to you – unless you happen to be so new to the faith that you’re off the hook. How many years have you been a Christian? How many years have you been a member of Peace? Can you honestly say that you have an excuse for not being able to teach your children the basics?

God expects his people to pursue understanding. He expects us to open our Bibles and read them. He expects us to make time for his word in our families. He expects us to take advantage of opportunities to learn more so that we are prepared to teach. Now, I cannot require you to come to every class I teach or you're going to hell. But if you never come, if you have no interest in learning more about Christ and his love, if you don't think that your faith is worth more than an occasional hour on Sundays, can you stand before God and say that you have a mature appreciation for his love? If your failure to study his word keeps you from being able to talk to your own family and friends about Jesus, do you think God is pleased with your level of commitment?

You know the answer. If we have neglected our spiritual growth, we are guilty of treating God's love and his commands as unimportant. All of us, children or adults, know how we feel when someone blows us off when we have something important to say. What God has to say is far more important than anything we want to spend our time on. What do we deserve for those times when we don't take him seriously? We deserve hell. It's that simple.

But the gospel message is that God set aside our hell. He didn't just look the other way. He didn't smile and indulge us as wayward children because we're so cute when we act like adults. He held us to his standard: perfection. But in love, he sent Jesus to be perfect in our place. Jesus truly did hold God's word in the highest honor. When he was twelve, he could teach it to the most learned men in Israel. Jesus loved and taught that word in our place. And that counts for us. It counts in place of all the times we didn't put it first in our lives. It counts for our failure to be the teachers God calls all of us to be. And Jesus went to the cross and died for our sin and our inattention. He paid for that sin in God's record. He didn't do that to make it easy for you to sin. He didn't do that so you could disregard all this because you're forgiven anyway. He did it because you and I deserve to die. And he loves us. So he died in our place. He rose to give us life. And now he calls us to study what that means so that we can grow up in our faith and teach his gospel.

II.

Only when our lives revolve around the sacrifice of Christ can we begin to mature in our faith. So that first test of maturity is: can we teach what the gospel says? But that's not the only test. There is also the test of our lives. My friends, **are you mature? Can you tell right from wrong?**

That seems like a pretty straightforward question, doesn't it? Most of us probably figure we can. But let me ask you another question: do you believe that most adults in our country know the difference between right and wrong? If you say "yes" then I submit to you that you've haven't really understood what we're talking about yet. Our text says, **"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."** To truly distinguish good from evil, we have to be mature in our faith. We have to know the teaching about righteousness. We're talking about God's idea of righteousness. That's very different from what passes for knowing right and wrong in our society.

Why is that true? This summer I've been spending a lot of time trimming the hedge around the backyard of the parsonage. The very first day I worked on it, I found this plant with pretty purple flowers that had grown up inside the bushes that are supposed to be in the hedge. Later, I discovered that those flowers are part of a system of vines that has twisted all through the hedge. In places, it's completely wrapped around the branches. As I began to rip it out, I discovered shoots and roots going everywhere. Without exaggeration, I've pulled at least a mile of vine out of the hedge. I've located the original root and pulled as much of it up as I can. I carefully pick up every berry that drops so no more seeds take root. Every couple of days, I walk past and inspect. And there's always more.

It's almost impossible to get that vine out of the hedge. Sin is like that only worse. It's wrapped all around our lives and we can't get it out. It wraps itself all around our ideas of right and wrong. This past week, there was an interesting little article in *Newsweek*. It claimed that most Americans are Hindus. Not formally. 76% of all Americans still identify themselves as Christians. But when you compare the attitudes of most people with what the Bible says, the overwhelming majority of Americans disagree. Their views are closer to Hinduism, which teaches that all gods are really the same god. Most Americans think all religions are pretty much the same and they all get us to god. Being good is what counts.

That is the rub. What does being good mean? On Friday, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest body in the United States with the word "Lutheran" in its name, voted to bless same sex relationships in congregations that are prepared to do so. They also voted for the first time to allow pastors who are

practicing homosexuals. When I read some of the arguments for these moves, I was struck by how often the clear words of Scripture were disregarded through arguments for “welcoming everybody” and “not being Pharisees” and “showing grace.” By friends, God’s Word is clear. Homosexuality is a sin. But many people in America today don’t think it’s wrong. They don’t know the way of righteousness because that vine of sin has completely twisted their minds.

It can happen to us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us we need to do more than just learn the fundamentals. We do need to know basics of Christianity: repentance and forgiveness, baptism, the resurrection to eternal life. God is not telling us to forget those things. He’s telling us to build on them. The more we build on the gospel, the more we will understand the life God wants us to live. Spiritual wisdom comes from listening to the Lord.

We need to grow up in our faith. When we had small children, we had rules that our kids didn’t always understand. When they got out of line, we spanked them. It didn’t take very long until the mere threat of a spanking was usually enough to halt whatever bad behavior was going on. But we never imagined for a moment that spanking would make them good Christians. The spanking was a tool to show them what Christian behavior was supposed to look like. But somewhere along the line, they had to want to live like Christians. We had to teach them about Jesus so that they matured and wanted to live a life of righteousness.

We’ve spent fourteen years trying to root the vine out of the hedge. We had to teach them the difference between what God says is the righteousness that comes from faith and what our society thinks is a good life. We dare never believe that work is finished. It’s not finished in us. It’s not finished in them. It’s not finished in you. If you are going to mature in your Christian faith, you need to study God’s word. For that purpose, we’re going to offer classes in what God says again this fall. Are you mature enough to care? Do you want to grow in your faith so that you understand what God really says and how he wants you to live?

If you have to admit that you haven’t cared in the past, know that Jesus died for you. He paid for your immaturity as a Christian. And he rose and forgave you. That forgiveness is his power to work in your heart – to root out that vine of sin. Now that you are forgiven, come and hear his word. Study it and grow in it.

In every congregation, there is going to be a range of maturity. We have children and adults. Sometimes, our children are more spiritually mature than their parents. Sometimes they want to hear the word more. But even among us adults, some people are always newer to the faith than others. Some people pursue maturity more than others. My friends, Jesus is the Savior of all of us. He died and he rose for every single sinner here. Grow in your faith in him so that you can be a teacher of your children and your friends and family. Grow in your faith in him so that you understand the righteous life God calls you to live. There is only one way to grow: be faithful in studying his word. Amen.