

Hebrews 6:1-3 “Counsel for Christians Who Are Living on Milk—part 2”**

Main Idea: Christians living on milk need to face two realities, according to Hebrews 5:11-6:3.

Review from last time (Hebrews 5:11-14)...

I. We need to face the problem of spiritual immaturity (11-14).

- A. We are given some indicators of immaturity (11-13).
- B. We are given some evidences of maturity (14).

Breaking new ground (Hebrews 6:1-3)...

II. We need to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (1-3).

- A. We need a good doctrinal foundation.
 - 1. It's vital to understand repentance and faith.
 - 2. It's vital to understand about baptism and laying on of hands.
 - 3. It's vital to understand about the coming resurrection and judgment.
- B. We need more than a good foundation.
 - 1. Do you know Christ?
 - 2. Do you have a good grasp of the basic doctrines?
 - 3. Are you taking steps to build on that foundation?
- C. We need to be moving towards maturity.
 - 1. Spiritual growth doesn't happen automatically.
 - 2. Spiritual growth requires intentionality.
 - 3. Spiritual growth occurs by God's grace and for God's glory.

The Bottom Line: God intends for His children to grow up and resemble His Son!

- 1. Are there things in our lives that are hindering our spiritual growth?
- 2. Are there things missing from our lives that are necessary for spiritual growth?
- 3. Are we serious about God's agenda for our lives?

They were brand new when we bought them, so they hadn't had any lessons, that's for sure. But, of course, baby calves don't need lessons when it comes to milk. When those baby Holstein calves entered the world, they hit the ground with an insatiable thirst for milk. The fact that their mothers' milk was to be sold for human consumption meant the dairy farmer needed to sell their offspring. And that's where I entered the picture.

I was still a high school student the day I became a surrogate mother to four baby calves. I can still remember

putting my hand up to their noses, and watching them curiously latch hold of my fingers with their soft mouths, feeling the sucking action as they pulled my fingers, searching and hoping to find the substance they craved. I quickly learned that baby calves are serious about milk!

Fighting serious, to be precise. Since I had only two hands I couldn't feed all four of them at once which created quite a challenge. As soon as I placed the bottle before them, all four would lunge for it, as if to say, "Out of my way! That's mine!" As they got bigger, the bottle gave way to a gallon bucket with an attached nipple, and more than once the head-butting of a greedy calf resulted in the bucket spilling its precious milk.

Yet the day came when the calves stopped drinking milk. It wasn't their choice, for sure. It was mine, and it wasn't because I was mean and uncaring that I took away their milk. I knew their growth and development depended on it. I knew that while baby calves need milk, if baby calves are going to mature they need to leave the milk and start eating solid food. The process is called *weaning*. I had to wean them off of the milk and transition them to a new diet of nutritious foods like corn and hay.

Were my Holstein friends pleased with the change? Not at first. Weaned calves do their share of bawling once you take the milk away, but it doesn't last long. They soon learn to love their new diet, and then it's not long before you stop referring to them as "baby" calves.

It's just a fact of life. Babies yearn for milk. Babies need milk. And in time babies leave the milk and transition to a fuller diet. That's not just for calves either. It was true for every litter of kittens I ever saw, the pigs we raised, the horses, and more. And as you well know, it's true for humans. By God's wonderful design, babies need milk, and also by God's design, babies eventually go on to maturity, and one of the evidences of maturity is when they stop living on milk.

What happens if they *don't*? What happens if a calf just refuses to move from milk to solids? It's the same thing that that would have happened to our daughters if they had failed to make the transition from milk to solids. They would have been sickly, would never have matured physically, and eventually would have died.

We know that moving from milk to solids is essential for physical growth. What about for *spiritual* growth? Is it essential that we move from milk to meat in order for spiritual maturity to occur? We may quickly *say* it is, but the evidence in church after church would call our profession into question.

Edward Farley asks a very important set of questions:

"Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, physicians, homemakers, scientists, salespeople, managers of all sorts, people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain at a literalist, elementary school level in their religious understanding? How is it that high school age church members move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA, calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of Scripture? How is it possible one can attend or even teach in a Sunday School for decades and at the end of that time lack the interpretive skills of someone who has taken three or four weeks in an introductory course in Bible at a university or seminary?" [\[1\]](#)

How *is* it possible? That's a good question. In part, it's possible because many church-goers aren't really convinced that spiritual growth is all that important. "As long as I'm going to heaven, that's the important thing," is a popular notion. "Growing in this life, well, sure it's good but it's kind of like icing on the cake."

And if church-goers aren't convinced is it not ultimately because many church-leaders aren't convinced? For many pastors (and I speak as a pastor), it's far easier to "run the church program" than it is to get serious about our calling: to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12) *so that* "the body of Christ may be built up...and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)." And that is *our* calling as a church, *to become mature* so that we resemble Christ.

The writer of Hebrews was not a "run the program, don't make waves" kind of church leader. That's why he said what he said in the text we began to unpack last week. He made it clear in Hebrews 5:11-6:3 that Christians living on

milk need to face two realities. We looked at the first reality last time. Let's quickly review it and then move to the second.

I. Reality #1: We need to face the problem of spiritual immaturity (11-14).

Verse 11—"We have much to say about this, *but*." The writer has more to say about the subject of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, a subject he's been addressing since chapter four. But he says he can't. The problem isn't that there isn't more to say—there's always more to say about Christ! The problem is the inability of his readers to handle more, and it's that problem that the writer lovingly confronts in this passage.

A. We are given some indicators of immaturity (11-13). The writer identifies for us five indicators of spiritually immature people. Allow me to restate them.

1. *They don't listen well to God's Word (11).* That's seen in verse 11, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn."

2. *They ought to be teachers, but still need to be taught (12a).* That's verse 12, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you."

3. *They are stuck on the ABCs of God's Word (12b).* Verse 12 again, "...you need someone to teach you the *elementary truths of God's word* all over again." As I mentioned last time, the Greek word is *stoicheia*, here translated "elementary truths," "first principles" in the KJV, and "basic principles" in the ESV. It has to do with *first things*, the ABCs which are essential building blocks for *later* things. Keep that thought in mind, for we'll return to it shortly.

4. *They can't handle solid food (12c).* Verse 12 concludes, "You need milk, not solid food!"

5. *They don't connect the Word to right living (13).* That's verse 13, "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness." There's the goal of learning our spiritual ABCs. It's not merely academic. It's all about *righteousness*. We receive the potential for righteousness by coming to know the Righteous One as our Savior, and then we begin to *live rightly*.

So these are some indicators of spiritual *immaturity* (*some*, not all, but the ones present in the readers of this epistle). What about spiritual *maturity*?

B. We are given some evidences of maturity (14). Here are three...

1. *They can handle solid food.* "Solid food is for the mature," says the text.

2. *They use what they learn.* Don't underestimate the significance of the words "constant use" in verse 14. By *constant use* they have trained themselves. Folks who are maturing don't just *hear* God's Word. They *use* it, and they use it *constantly*.

3. *They have learned to discern what pleases God and what doesn't.* The writer says they "have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

During the past week as I reflected further on these verses, it dawned on me that the writer of Hebrews operated by some assumptions that many *don't assume* today. First, he operated by the assumption that *God's children are supposed to grow*. Second, this text reveals the assumption that God's children should be *held accountable to grow*. That's why he's writing this. A third assumption is that God's children should be *confronted if they aren't growing*. And fourth, this kind of confrontation is what *real friends do*.

Notice the first verse right after this confrontation, Hebrews 6:9, "Even though we speak like this, *dear friends*^[2]." This is what true friends do with each other. They do all they can to facilitate growth unto Christlikeness. When it's

being hindered, they confront the hindrances, yet even then they offer this encouragement, “We are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation (9).” Real friends help each other grow with help that, at times, comes in the form of admonishment. Proverbs 27:6 (KJV) says it well, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

So there’s the first reality. We need to *face the problem of spiritual immaturity*.

Now notice the next word in the text (the first word of 6:1), “Therefore.” What we are about to hear are the implications of the first reality. In light of the problem of spiritual immaturity, the writer is going to address what needs to happen. And what’s that? Verse 1—“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”

As we commented last time, that’s *not* what we would expect the writer to say. He just told his readers they couldn’t handle solid food and still needed milk. So we would expect him to say, “So here’s some *milk* for you.” Like Paul did with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:2, “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.”

But that’s *not* the approach the writer of Hebrews took. Even though his readers need milk, he tells them to *leave* the elementary teachings about Christ and *go on* to maturity. In other words, you’re not ready for solid food yet and what you need is milk, but I’m not going to give you milk. I’m calling for you to leave the milk and get busy growing!^[3]

Which brings us to the second reality that Christians living on milk must face.

II. Reality #2: We need to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (1-3).

Let me reemphasize something. If you are a new Christian, this counsel isn’t for you. You need milk for you are a baby in Christ, and you ought not feel bad for wanting milk. But if you’re *not* a spiritual baby, if you’ve called yourself a Christian for some time now and yet you’re still living on milk, this charge is for you. It’s time to leave the milk and get involved in the process of maturity!

Yes, spiritual maturity is a *process*, and we learn three insights about this process in verses 1-3.

A. We need a good doctrinal foundation. Ponder again the command in verse 1, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” The writer urges his readers to *leave the elementary teachings*. Of course, in order to leave them, that assumes something, right? If I told you to *leave your Bible here and go into the next room*, that command assumes something, doesn’t it? It assumes that you have a Bible. You can’t *leave* what you don’t *have*.

Here the writer tells his readers to *leave* the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity. That assumes they had been taught and grasped *the elementary teachings about Christ*. And as Hebrews makes clear, we *can’t* make that assumption about every person who professes Christ. Many can’t leave the elementary teachings because they never really learned them in the first place.

J. I. Packer offers this assessment, “Our great need today is a renewal of systematic Christian instruction—catechetical teaching—for adults. It need not be called that, nor need it take the form of rigid drilling in present formulae, which is how old-time Protestants taught their children; but somehow or other, opportunities must be given for folk in and just outside the churches to examine the Christian essentials, because there are so many for whom this is a prime need.”^[4]

The problem isn’t new. In the 1500s Martin Luther did an inspection of the churches and was appalled at what he found. So he wrote his little catechism, with this in the introduction:

“Grace, mercy, and peace in Jesus Christ, our Lord, from Martin Luther, to all faithful, godly pastors and

preachers.

“The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and quite unfitted for teaching.”^[5]

One of my treasured possessions is my grandfather’s catechism book. He wrote his name in the front when he went through it as a young teen around the year 1918. What did he learn? Here’s a sampling:

Question 1: What should be the chief concern of man? Answer: Man’s chief concern should be the eternal salvation of his soul.

Question 2: How can you secure the eternal salvation of your soul? Answer: We secure the eternal salvation of our soul through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the pages that followed he learned the meaning and significance of the Ten Commandments, as well as the answers (with Scriptural support) to dozens of fundamental questions like these: *Question 40: What do the Scriptures teach concerning God? Question 41: What is the meaning of: God is eternal? Question 43: What is the meaning of: God is omnipresent?* With subsequent questions asking what it means to say that God is *true, omniscient, all-wise, holy*, and so on.

Question 65: What is now the natural state of man? Answer: Since the fall man is corrupt, therefore unfit for anything good, but prepared for and inclined to evil. This inherited corruption is called original sin.

Question 69: Did God leave mankind to perish in this state of sin and misery? Answer: No; God in His mercy resolved from all eternity to redeem fallen mankind by His only begotten Son.

Now answer this. Does learning these elementary teachings about Christ guarantee that a person will be saved? No. My grandfather went through catechism as a child, but never came to know Christ personally until he was around fifty years of age.

But here *is* a guarantee. A person who *does not know* the elementary teachings about Christ will *not mature* spiritually. You cannot go on to maturity, according to Hebrews 6:1, unless you have first put a foundation in place, a foundation Hebrews calls the “elementary teachings about Christ.”

What are these “elementary teachings”? The writer actually lists six foundational doctrines, three categories with a pair of doctrines in each. The first two pertain to salvation, the next two to initial church experience, and the final two to future things.^[6] Here’s the doctrinal foundation he says his readers received, and by implication, *we need*.

1. *It’s vital to understand repentance and faith.* Specifically, he refers to “the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.” That’s the message, for instance, that Paul preached wherever he went, according to Acts 20:21: “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”^[7] It doesn’t get any more basic. To be saved a person must *repent* and place their *faith* in Christ.

By the way, in some churches that’s *all* a person ever hears, salvation messages week after week. And the result? If unbelievers are present, they may be saved, but what about the believers? On that diet, they’ll remain spiritual toddlers and begin to do what toddlers do (like fight over toys and pout when they don’t get their way).

2. *It’s vital to understand about baptism and laying on of hands.* Verse 2 mentions “instruction about baptisms.” The Greek is plural, *baptismon*, hence, “baptisms.” The same word appears in 9:10, there translated “ceremonial washings.” There were many “washings” prescribed by the Mosaic Law (see Mark 7:4). But of course, Christ fulfilled the Law, and the readers of this epistle no doubt learned about that early on in their Christian life. They learned that they didn’t need to keep those “washings” any longer. They’d been “washed” by the blood of

Christ, and had made that public by the “washing” of baptism.

They also had learned about “the laying on of hands.” Under the Mosaic law, the Jews were instructed to place their hands on the head of the burnt offering (Lev. 1:4). Likewise, the high priest put his hands on the animal he sacrificed (Lev. 16:21). Laying on of hands signified commitment and devotion. Yes, they learned all about that, too.

3. *It's vital to understand about the coming resurrection and judgment.* The Hebrews had learned about “the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” They were taught that there's more to life than this life. It's appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment (as they'll hear again in 9:27).

So the process of spiritual maturity begins by laying a good doctrinal foundation. But does it end there? No, here's insight #2...

B. We need more than a good foundation. Notice verse 1 again, “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on...” The writer tells his readers to *go on*. We'll talk specifically about the destination of this journey in a moment, but for now please notice it's necessity. The text says to *go on*. Is a foundation good? Absolutely, but every contractor knows it's not the end but just the beginning.

So three questions are in order...

1. *Do you know Christ?* That's the bedrock foundational issue, to know Him.

2. *Do you have a good grasp of the basic doctrines?* We've just taken a quick survey of six basic doctrinal truths. Could you defend them using your Bible? Perhaps you need to read a good basic theology book. “What will people think?” you ask.

C. S. Lewis had this to say: “When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am 50, I read them openly. When I became a man, I put away childish things -- including the fear of childishness and the desire to be grown-up.”^[8]

Our privilege as a church is to help you develop a solid theological foundation. That's one of the primary objectives of our Wednesday evening Bible study. Last year we offered a *Theology Survey* class entitled, “You and Your Beliefs.” Currently, we're in the middle of an *Old Testament Survey*.

3. *Are you taking steps to build on that foundation?* Notice I said *build on*, not *abandon*. Philip Hughes explains, “To leave the elementary doctrines does not mean to despise or abandon them any more than a pupil who has learned the ABCs can then dispense with the alphabet... The first principles of Christian truth are basic to every stage of development and are no less essential at the end than they are at the beginning. The point is that the beginning is not a stopping-place; it is the door to progress and the springboard to achievement.”^[9]

At the beginning of Peter Jeffery's helpful book, *Bitesize Theology*, Jeffery offers this important perspective:

“There are not two sets of doctrines in the Bible, one called milk and the other called meat, one for new believers and the other for more mature saints. There is only one body of truth and all believers, young or old in the faith, need it all. The ABC is doctrine presented in a more basic and easy-to-understand way. Every Christian needs to understand the difference between justification and sanctification, and such biblical doctrines can be taught with understanding to Christian teenagers. Indeed there is no doctrine in the Bible that Christian youngsters do not need to know and love. But there is a difference in teaching doctrine to a young people's fellowship and to a ministers' conference. The difference is not in subject matter but in depth and application. It is not a matter of watering down the doctrine to make it more acceptable but of explaining it in a way that makes it understandable to young believers.”^[10]

Well said! Let me say a word to those who teach children and youth (that would start with parents and grandparents, and include those who work with our young people at church). *Teach them theology*. Can a twelve year old understand the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement? Sure, they have for centuries! Our kids (and adults

for that matter) can handle a lot more than we often give them credit for. For sure, we need to know it before we can teach it, and then we need to use basic language and illustrations they can grasp. But stretch them with good theology.

Why do so many young people chuck the faith when they hit the college age? Here's part of the reason. We've given them a "dumbed down" version of God in their upbringing. Oh, they know Bible stories and maybe even Bible verses, but they don't know the God of the Bible! Let's give our kids a *Big God* they can *grow into* rather than *grow out of*!

Insight # 1—we need a good doctrinal foundation. #2—we need more than a foundation. Now a third insight...

C. We need to be moving towards maturity. "Let us *go on to maturity*," is the charge in verse 1. How do we do that? First, we must grasp that...

1. *Spiritual growth doesn't happen automatically.* Barclay offers this sobering charge, "There are Christians in whose faith there has been no development for thirty or forty or fifty or sixty years...They are grown men and women and yet insist on remaining content with the religious development of a child."[\[11\]](#)

Jesus said that to enter the kingdom one must be *childlike* (Matt. 18:1ff.). But there's a difference between being *childlike* and *childish*. As Barclay wisely put it, "Peter Pan makes a charming play on the stage; but the man who will not grow up make a tragedy in real life."[\[12\]](#)

2. *Spiritual growth requires intentionality.* In other words, we need to get *intentional*. About what? David Breese offers this insight, "Strong sons of God are not perfected by childish pursuits."[\[13\]](#)

What are childish pursuits? A familiar Mother Goose rhyme goes:

PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

I'VE BEEN TO LONDON TO VISIT THE QUEEN.

PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT, WHAT DID YOU THERE?

I FRIGHTENED A LITTLE MOUSE UNDER THE CHAIR.

Like that cat, Christians sometimes settle for petty involvements, trivial pursuits—chasing mice—when we have the opportunity to spend time with royalty, with the King! Instead of remaining content with minimum daily requirements, we can deepen our relationship with God and grow into maturity.[\[14\]](#)

Take inventory of your life and ask yourself, "What activities am I engaging in for the purpose of maturing in Christ?"

Amy Carmichael once penned these thoughts: "Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that. But they won through step by step by little bits of wills, little denials of self, little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these little hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph no spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment."[\[15\]](#)

If you know Christ, you can mature, but it takes *intentionality*. We mustn't be passive. We must roll up our sleeves and take steps to *go on to maturity*.

Philip Yancey writes, "Human beings grow by striving, working, stretching; and in a sense, human nature needs problems more than solutions. Why are not all prayers answered magically and instantly? Why must every convert travel the same tedious path of spiritual discipline? Because persistent prayer, and fasting, and study, and meditation are designed primarily for our sakes, not for God's. Kierkegaard said that Christians reminded him of schoolboys who want to look up the answers to their math problems in the back of the book rather than work them through...We yearn

for shortcuts. But shortcuts usually lead away from growth, not toward it. Apply the principle directly to Job: what was the final result of the testing he went through? As Rabbi Abraham Heschel observed, "Faith like Job's cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken."^[16]

"Then it's all up to us?" you say. No. Notice verse 3—"And God permitting, we will do so." What does that tell us? This...

3. *Spiritual growth occurs by God's grace and for God's glory.* Ponder those words, "And God permitting." If today you are no longer an infant but are a growing, maturing Christian, then please don't respond, "Yea, I'm really proud of myself. I moved from infancy to spiritual adulthood," for when growth occurs it's always by God's grace and thus for God's glory!

The Bottom Line: God intends for His children to grow up and resemble His Son!

That's why He chose us and saved us according to Romans 8:29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

So let's ask ourselves these three questions...

1. *Are there things in our lives that are hindering our spiritual growth?* Here's one, "I don't have time." In reality, the truth is we don't have time *if* we keep doing everything we're currently doing. So take inventory. How much television do you watch in a week's time? How much time listening to music? Reading the newspaper? Nothing wrong with those activities, but there's *a lot* wrong with putting them ahead of getting to know God better.

2. *Are there things missing from our lives that are necessary for spiritual growth?* For some of us, the Bible is confusing and boring. The problem is we don't understand its vocabulary. Peter Jeffery explains, "Just about every activity of men and women has its own peculiar vocabulary. A man would not be much of a musician if he did not understand the difference between a crochet and a quaver. And youngsters with their computers all know what a mega-bite and CD-ROM are. Even sport has its special vocabulary—soccer has its back-four, golf its birdies and pars, cricket its maiden over and tennis its 15-love. The followers of these activities all know the vocabulary because they love what they are doing and constant use of words make them familiar. Surely it is not unreasonable to expect Christians to know the vocabulary of what they believe."^[17]

If you're interested in getting a better handle on the Bible's vocabulary, I encourage you to read Peter Jeffery's helpful book, *Bitesize Theology*.

3. *Are we serious about God's agenda for our lives?* I say "our" because that's the language of Hebrews 6. It's not just *my* maturity that should matter to me, but *ours*. God's agenda is that *we* grow up as a body and accurately reflect His Son. Let's make sure His agenda is ours.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] In his article, "Educated Clergy, Uneducated Laity," taken from *Teaching the First Principles*, by Jeff Reed, p. 4.

[2] "Beloved" in the KJV and ESV.

[3] I'm indebted to F. F. Bruce for this observation; p. 111.

[4] J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, taken from *Teaching the First Principles*, p. 5.

- [5] Quote taken from Jeff Reed, *Teaching the First Principles*, p. 5.
- [6] Observation by Robert Gromacki, p. 104.
- [7] See also Acts 26:20
- [8] *Of Other World*, Edited by Walter Hooper.
- [9] Philip Hughes, p. 195.
- [10] Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, pp. 11-12.
- [11] William Barclay, p. 50.
- [12] William Barclay, p. 51.
- [13] David Breese, Living For Eternity, Moody Press, 1988, p. 78.
- [14] Source Unknown, found on sermonillustrations.com
- [15] Quoted in *Holy Sweat*, Tim Hansel, 1987, Word Books Publisher, p. 130.
- [16] Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God*, Zondervan, pp. 207-8.
- [17] Peter Jeffery, pp. 13-14.