

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

- I. We need to face the problem of spiritual immaturity (11-14).
 - A. Here are some indicators of immaturity (11-13).
 1. They don’t listen well to God’s Word (11).
 2. They ought to be teachers, but still need to be taught (12a).
 3. They are stuck on the ABCs of God’s Word (12b).
 4. They can’t handle solid food (12c).
 5. They don’t connect the Word to right living (13).
 - B. Here are some evidences of maturity (14).
 1. They can handle solid food.
 2. They use what they learn.
 3. They have learned to discern what pleases God and what doesn’t.
- II. We need to get involved in the process of spiritual maturity (1-3).
 - A. We need a good doctrinal foundation.
 - B. We need more than a good foundation.
 - C. We need to be moving towards maturity.

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

Rest in the Son is the theme of our current series in Hebrews. Hebrews is a hope-giving letter, filled with deep and wonderful truth about the greatest of subjects. God offers us rest through His dear Son, the Lord Jesus. But I need to issue a warning before we read and ponder today’s text. Put on your steel-toed boots. The writer is going to change his tone today, and next week, and the next. What the Holy Spirit has led him to say may be painful to hear. But necessary. In a sentence, here is his message. *It’s time to stop living on milk.* Let’s read and ponder together today’s text.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 5:11-6:3

“I want my baba!” I can still see our youngest daughter, Katie, toddling through the house, her favorite stuffed animal (“Pepper-doggie”) cradled in one arm and her precious bottle of milk in the other. My, how she loved her bottle of milk, her “baba” as she called it! Milk wasn’t merely a thirst-quencher for her. It was her greatest desire in life.

We still joke about the time that our neighbor saw little Katie walking in the yard with her *baba*, and he said kiddingly to her, “I’m going to take your bottle!” She instantly ran as fast as she could towards the house, screaming all the way. She couldn’t imagine life without her bottle of milk.

That’s the way it was when Katie was a baby, even a toddler. Her bottle was seldom far from her. But I hardly ever see Katie drink milk anymore. That, of course, is because she’s now a married woman with three children.

Things change when you move from toddlerhood to adulthood. It’s called *growing up*. And if things *don’t change*, we know that something’s wrong. You’d do a double take this morning if you saw a thirteen year old walk into church sucking on a bottle of milk, and you may even approach one of the deacons and say, “Uh, I hate to be nosy, but is that person okay?”

It’s one thing when a baby lives on milk. That’s what babies do. But an adult? No. Adults don’t live on milk. They can certainly enjoy milk. There’s nothing like a cold

**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 For a previous look at this passage, see the Hebrews series preached at WBC in 2008.

glass of milk to wash down a warm chocolate chip cookie. But adults don't live on milk. They've moved on to solid food, right? And the development of their diet is a primary indicator that they have *matured* physically.

With this simple illustration in mind, we come to the end of Hebrews 5. It's here that the writer of Hebrews makes a shocking announcement in verse 11. "We have much to say about this, but." He's been teaching them about the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, and has twice mentioned that Christ is a high priest forever "in the order of Melchizedek" (verses 6 & 10). He'd like to say more about this amazing subject, but he can't.

His reason? He says, "It's hard to explain." It's not that he's exhausted his knowledge of the subject, for he'll actually return to this discussion of Melchizedek in chapter 7. Why then does he pause? Why is it hard to explain? He says it's because "you have become dull of hearing" (NIV "you are slow to learn").

He's afraid this vital, life-changing truth about Jesus is going right over their heads. And why would that be the case? It boiled down to a very basic problem, namely that his readers who were old enough spiritually to handle solid food were still *needing milk*.

How do you help Christians who are old enough in the Lord that they *ought* to be able to handle solid food but still *can't*? That's not a moot question in our day where Christianity is often a mile wide and half an inch deep. For many churches, it's moral platitudes week after week. For others, it's the Romans Road week after week. In either case, the result is the same. People aren't able to handle the meat of God's Word. How do you help such a person?

Again, I must warn you. This is a painful text. Yet it's also a life-giving text in which the Spirit of God offers us very practical, pointed help. According to Hebrews 5:11-6:3, Christians living on milk need to face two realities. We'll probe the first reality today, then mention the second reality and develop it carefully next week, Lord willing.

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

Spiritual immaturity is a problem and it must be faced. We're not talking about out there now, but in here. Churches are filled with spiritually immature Christians, in the first century and today. What does it look like? You might be surprised.

A. Here are some indicators of immaturity (11-13). The writer identifies for us five indicators of spiritually immature people.

1. *They don't listen well to God's Word (11).* Verse 11 says, "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."² Much to say, he says. Now that's an understatement, for when it comes to the subject of Jesus Christ, there's always more to say!

Thus far in Hebrews, the writer has taught us that Christ is the eternal Son of God, the creator and heir of all things, the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of God's being (1:2-3). He's superior to the angels who actually serve Him and His people, as we learned in chapter one.

In chapter two we learned that in order to bring many sons to glory, the Son of God became a man, suffered, and died in the place of sinful men, conquered death, thus providing atonement for all who trust in Him. In chapter three the writer taught us that Christ is superior to Moses, and in chapter four that Christ offers Sabbath-rest to all who will stop trying to merit God's favor and instead enter fully into the satisfaction of His Son's accomplishments.

² The NIV says, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn."

And because of what His Son *did*, here's what we now *have*. According to the end of chapter four and the first part of chapter five, we now have a *great high priest* in heaven who gives us direct access into the presence of God.

Yet there's more. We have *much more* to say about this great high priest, says the writer. But he can't say it, not yet.

Why not? It's *hard to explain*, he says. The problem isn't that his subject matter is too difficult, although the truth about Christ's priesthood certainly is mind-stretching. The problem is that *you are slow to learn* (says the NIV), *dull of hearing* (says the ESV and AV). Slow/dull comes from the Greek word *nothros* which means "careless, slothful, sluggish." The only other place in the NT that we see this word is in Hebrews 6:12, there translated "sluggish" in the ESV, "slothful" in the AV, and "lazy" in the NIV.

And what was lazy? The NIV uses the words, "to learn," but it's actually the noun *akoe* which means "hearing." The readers were guilty of "lazy hearing."

Years ago I attended the memorial service for Dan Rase, the youth pastor at Temple Baptist Church that God took to heaven at the age of forty-three. Many testimonies were given, but one was rather unique. A woman shared how she, as a child watched Dan as a teenager, and she shared that what she remembered to the present day was where Dan sat in church. "He always went front and center. Even if his teenage friends were sitting in the back, he sat down front and center." She said she once asked him why he sat in the front, and he simply replied, "Because I get distracted and I don't want to miss a thing."

My friend, is that your heart attitude when it comes to the ministry of God's Word? *I don't want to miss a thing!* Sadly, it wasn't for the Hebrews. They were *lazy hearers*. Apparently, they were preoccupied with other interests. Distractions would be the more accurate term. Specifically, they were distracted by the criticisms they were hearing from their family members and friends who were pressuring them to leave Christ and return to their old ways in Judaism.

Warren Wiersbe offers this insight, "One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself."³

This is the first indicator. The spiritually immature don't listen well to God's Word. I'm grateful that this church is filled with people who, by God's grace, *do* listen well. But listening well isn't natural, nor is it guaranteed. It takes continual work. As sinners, our tendency is to be lazy hearers. And though we are redeemed sinners, we still battle that tendency.

What must we do to overcome this tendency? Consider this action plan. Being a good hearer involves listening with our eyes, fingers, mouths, and lives.

First, listen with your *eyes*. Look at the person teaching. Look up the verses. Look in your own Bible. And I recommend a Bible made of paper and ink, with words you can underline and margins in which you can insert notes, and then look over and over for the next ten or twenty years.

Second, listen with your *fingers*. Again, take notes. Force yourself to become a participant in the learning process.

Third, listen with your *mouth*. When you eat your Sunday noon meal, talk with your family and friends about what you learned from God's Word that morning.

³ Warren Wiersbe, p. 294.

Fourth, listen with your *life*. Every time you are under the ministry of God's Word, resolve to act upon what you have heard and learned. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

The spiritually immature don't listen well to God's Word. Here's a second indicator.⁴

2. *They ought to be teachers, but still need to be taught (12a)*. Notice verse 12a, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again." Stop there and ponder that assessment carefully. *By this time*, he says. Those words indicate that as time passes a change is supposed to be occurring. We all enter God's family the same way, as spiritual babies. But as time moves on, so should the stage of infancy. God intends for His children to grow up.

By this time, *you ought to be teachers*. Granted, not every Christian has the gift of teaching, but every Christian by God's design should engage in *teaching*. God's intent is for His children to mature so that they can reproduce what He has given them. We are *born to reproduce*, as Dawson Trotman rightly said it in his book by that title.

Make disciples. Teach others, said Jesus in the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Learn, and give it away. The question isn't, "Have I learned enough from God's Word to *satisfy my curiosity*?" The question is, "Am I learning God's Word so that I can *help others* learn it?"

May I ask you something? Do you consider yourself to be a baby Christian? Nothing wrong with being a baby Christian, for sure. We all enter the family of God the same way. As babies. But my question is this. Is that how you see yourself? Are you a *baby* Christian? If you are, this next question *isn't* for you. It's for all who *don't* consider themselves babes in Christ.

Are you teaching others God's Word? Again, I'm grateful that many of you are. You're teaching your children God's Word, and your grandchildren. You're teaching a Sunday School class, or children in our FLY ministry, or doing a Bible study with teens. Or you're inviting young believers to your house and teaching them God's Word, and that's a good thing. It's a prime evidence of spiritual growth and maturity.

But here's the problem. When we've learned enough of God's Word that we ought to be teachers, yet instead of teaching we're just soaking up teaching, it's an indicator of immaturity. Here's another indicator.

3. *They are stuck on the ABCs of God's Word (12b)*. Notice the next segment of verse 12 (NIV), "You need someone to teach you the *elementary truths of God's word* all over again." Just what are these "elementary truths of God's word"? The KJV calls them "the first principles of the oracles of God." The ESV says "the basic principles of the oracles of God." The Greek word *stoicheia* refers to "any first thing."

For instance, the letters of the alphabet are the *stoicheia*, the first principles, the building blocks of speech. It's one of the first things a child learns. The little guy or gal says, A...B...C...D...E...F...G, right? It's also one of the first things a child of God needs. A...B...C...D...E...F...G. He needs the ABCs of God's Word.

But Hebrews 5 isn't addressed to baby Christians. The people reading this letter are people who need the ABCs "*all over again*". That phrase would indicate that these readers had not only failed to grow but actually lost ground. They needed the elementary truths *all over again*.

⁴ Verses 12-13 (ESV) "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, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child."

Brothers and sisters, the mere passing of time does not guarantee that spiritual maturity is happening. A person can be a seventy-year-old charter church member, yet spiritually immature. Age does not produce maturity.

Think carefully now. Listen carefully to the God-inspired words of this writer. He's identifying what it means to be spiritually immature. And what are the marks? One, they don't listen well to God's Word. Two, they're not teaching anyone else God's Word. Three, they're stuck on the ABCs.

I think we can take it a step further. It's possible that this person once did teach others God's Word and was maturing in the faith, but then got sidetracked and kicked it into neutral. And since the Christian life is an uphill battle, what happens when a person kicks it into neutral? You guessed it. He doesn't stay where he is. He starts coasting *backwards*. So he was maturing, yes, in the past. But now he doesn't look very mature any more. Consequently, he needs the ABCs all over again. And there's more.

4. *They can't handle solid food (12c)*. Notice the last sentence in verse 12. "You need milk, not solid food!" "Milk" here refers to "the elementary truths/basic principles of God's word." The terms are synonymous. In 6:1 the author calls them "the elementary teachings/doctrine of Christ."

What does the term "elementary" indicate? I went to Park Elementary School in Dover, Ohio. I knew from the first day I started kindergarten that I wasn't supposed to stay in Park Elementary School all my life. I knew that I was supposed to eventually leave *elementary* school and move on to *junior high* school, then to *senior high* school, then to college, and so on.

If there are *elementary* truths of God's word, that would imply there are also what? *Non-elementary* truths. We might call them *junior high* truths, and *senior high* truths, and there's supposed to be a progression of spiritual learning taking place.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that the milk of the word here refers to what Christ did while on earth (His birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection). The *solid food* or *meat* of the word refers to what Christ is doing right now in heaven (that's what the writer of Hebrews was just talking about in the previous section, Christ's present work as high priest). Wiersbe concludes, "We begin the Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth. We grow in the Christian life on the basis of His unfinished work in heaven."⁵

While we could debate Wiersbe's examples of milk and meat doctrines, there's no debating this. Christians are supposed to be learning new truth and then teaching it to others. And when a Christ-follower does that, it's evidence that the maturing process is happening. And when he or she doesn't, it's evidence that it's not happening.

So let's take inventory. I'm going to say four words. Justification, redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. Can you define those terms? Can you teach those precious concepts to your kids and grandkids and others? Are you doing so? If you can't, are you taking steps to get to the place where you can? Are you taking notes when God's Word is taught at church? When was the last time you read a good book on the substitutionary atonement of Christ?

Let's be honest with ourselves. As I recall, I didn't see any 35-year-olds sitting in my kindergarten class at Park Elementary School, saying their ABCs, and drinking from tiny milk cartons. The 35-year-olds I knew then had moved on from the ABCs. So how can

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 295.

it be that in church after church there are people who are spiritual 35-year-olds still living on milk?

Let me clarify once again. If you are a babe in Christ, Hebrews 5:12 isn't talking to you. If you are drinking milk, then good for you! That's what God designed babies to do. No, this is talking about people who have already gone through the milk stage of spiritual development and ought now to be digesting solid food, but they still need milk.

You say, "I want what you're talking about. I want to move from the milk to solid food. What should I do?"

I'm encouraged by your question! Your desire to grow is evidence that you are maturing. Back in the late 1990s we developed two sets of materials to address this question. There's the Two:Two program for men and the Titus 2 program for women. If you want a basic discipleship course, this *isn't* it. This is a highly intensive three-year program that's intended to produce reproducing reproducers. Two:Two is an acrostic, *Teaching willing others to win others*. It's based on the exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

If you participate in Two:Two or Titus 2, you will engage in much personal study of the Word and read other resources intended to help you develop a working theology. Then you will meet monthly with a group of two or three other people. By the time you are done, you will be equipped to begin leading your own group. To date, about three dozen people (my estimate) have participated. If you're interested in learning more, just ask around. It won't take you long to find someone who's been through the material. Ask them to teach you, so you then can teach others. If you can't find someone, talk to Pastor Matt. He told me this week that we have two or three groups graduating soon so there should be several new individuals ready to start groups soon.

By now you may be thinking that spiritual immaturity is linked only to the cognitive, but it's not. A person can have a lot of Bible knowledge (they can go through Two:Two) and still be spiritually immature. What's missing? The fifth indicator.

5. *They don't connect the Word to right living (13)*. Verse 13 says (NIV), "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness." What happens if we try to live on spiritual milk? Two outcomes according to this verse.

The first? We remain a spiritual infant. "He is a child," says the ESV. Again, it's fine to be called a child if you're under a certain age. But it's not a compliment to call an 18-year-old a *child*, nor to call a person who has been a member of a Bible teaching church for a few years a *child*. It's the outcome of living on spiritual milk.

The second outcome? The NIV says, he won't be "acquainted with the teachings about righteousness". The ESV says, "Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness." That's not surprising when you think about it. God's Word produces righteousness. When a person repents and believes in the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, that person is *declared righteous* by God and then begins to demonstrate righteousness in his or her life.

But our text says that this isn't happening in the life of the spiritually immature. They are *not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness*. They are *unskilled in the word of righteousness*. What does that indicate? The verb "not acquainted/unskilled" is the Greek word *apeiros* which literally means "no test" or "no experience." It suggests

that the immature person lacks the experience of applying biblical truth to every day life. He doesn't "integrate doctrine with duty," as Gromacki puts it.⁶

He may be able to recite Bible verses, but he doesn't connect Bible-truth to his life. It doesn't direct what he does as a dad, or at work, or in the privacy of his den, or what she does as a mom, or when she's making Facebook posts. He may be able to win at Bible Trivia Pursuit, but he's not a more righteous person because of his Bible knowledge.

So note-taking is good, but it's a means, not an end. Writing down Bible truth should lead to living Bible truth. Right living. Righteousness.

We understand this. When a church member blows up in a church meeting, we say he's acting like a child. It's not right. It's an evidence of a lack of righteousness.

So too when a Christ-follower writes bad checks, or watches sexually immoral video clips, or tells white lies, or worries all the time. These are indications, not of maturity, but the lack of spiritual maturity, that the person is unskilled in applying the word of righteousness.

W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "As water never rises above its level so what we do never rises above what we are... We shall never take people one hair's breadth beyond our own spiritual attainment. We may point to higher things, but we shall only take them as far as we ourselves have gone."

So, what are the evidences of spiritually immaturity? Take another look. The spiritually immature don't listen well to God's Word. They ought to be teachers but still need to be taught. They are stuck on the ABCs of God's Word. They can't handle solid food. And they don't connect the Word to right living.

Now notice the contrast in verse 14. "But solid food is for the *mature*." Stop there. For the *teleion*. The initiated, the complete, the perfect, the genuine. As one lexicon put it, "being at an advanced stage of spiritual development, usually as a result of experience, teaching, and in most cases time."⁷

That's good. We don't mature in a hurry. It takes time. But not just time. Teaching too. And experience, which is the application of teaching to life.

B. Here are some evidences of maturity (14). Notice verse 14, "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." The NIV says, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Who are the spiritually mature? Here are three evidences.

1. *They can handle solid food.* Don't miss those first three words. "*But solid food is for the mature,*" says the text. Not milk. A child can handle milk. But what happens if you give a steak to a two-year-old? He can't handle it. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age," says the KJV.

Some biblical truth is like milk. *Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.* Other truth is like a steak. *Jesus Christ is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.* We need both kinds of truth and it's the mature who can handle the latter, says the writer of Hebrews.

2. *They use what they learn.* Notice the words "constant practice" in verse 14. The NIV says "constant use". Again, it takes time. No one gets holy in a hurry. But the time must be used, invested, stewarded. The spiritually mature don't just *hear* God's

⁶ Robert Gromacki, p. 99.

⁷ From *Logos*, Westcott-Hort.

Word. They *practice* it, and they practice it *constantly*. By *constant practice* they have trained themselves.

3. *They have learned to discern what pleases God and what doesn't.* The ESV says, "For those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."⁸

That's what we're after. *Discernment*. A mature person knows how to apply God's Word to difficult decisions. About his use of money, or time, or opportunities. He engages his mind and sees the distinctions between good (what pleases God) and evil (what doesn't please God).

Do I take this job? Do I let my child date that person? Do I approve this government policy? Do I comment on Facebook about this policy? Do I listen to this podcast? A spiritually mature person exhibits discernment.

A toddler can't do that. He takes a screwdriver and sticks it in the electric outlet, to see "the pretty blue light," as he puts it. It's why when he sees the pretty red glow on the stove top, he reaches to touch it. It's also why a spiritual toddler watches television programs he ought not watch, and may wear provocative clothing, and engage in testimony-harming forms of entertainment. He hasn't been trained yet to know what's good and what's not good. He hasn't learned yet to *distinguish good from evil*.⁹

Here's what makes preaching so challenging and so vital. In every church service there ought to be spiritual babies as well as those who are spiritually mature present. So at what level should I preach? The babies can't handle solid food, and the mature need more than milk. That's a problem, but not a new one.

The options? One option is to put the babies in one room and the mature in another and feed them different meals at different times. Some churches do that. It's not necessarily a bad option either. But a better option in my opinion is the *family* approach.

I remember when our girls were little. Sherry and I didn't stick them in the other room when we ate our meals. We put them right next to us at the dining room table. Sure, they started in a high chair, but they were right next to the big table. They learned from the very beginning where they were heading. At first, they couldn't even feed themselves. We had to hold the bottle for them. Later, we had to cut the food into smaller pieces and spoon feed them. Even when they were old enough to feed themselves, they didn't select the menu. Their mother did, to insure they ate not just what they *wanted*, but what they needed, a healthy, well balanced diet. The point is, *families help each other eat and grow*.

Brothers and sisters, we too are a family. The church is the family of God. So let me speak to the mature members of this church family for a moment. When we're eating our spiritual food together on Sundays, I encourage you to look around and see who's having trouble chewing. Sit next to them. Help them find Hebrews 5. They don't know where it is. Invite them to your house Sunday afternoon and ask them what they didn't understand. Explain who Melchizedek was, what a priest is, and why it matters. Then help them apply the truth they've learned to their lives, how the Lordship of Christ affects the way we spend our money, and time, and choose our friends, etc.

⁸ The NIV says they "have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

⁹ A baby will put anything into its mouth. A baby Christian is no different. He or she will listen to any television preacher that calls himself 'Christian,' not realizing there are many counterfeits.

And a word to you who are spiritual babes. Be humble and teachable and never be afraid to ask for help. Everyone in this church family was once where you are, and it's our privilege to help you grow. It's what families do!

And here's a practice piece of advice. Don't remain a Sunday morning Christian. That's where we usually begin, by coming to the morning worship service, but if that's the only piece of church life we experience our growth will be stunted. We need opportunities to digest God's Word. That's what our community groups are for, and our second Sunday evening services. And Sunday School too, a wonderful opportunity not only to learn God's Word but to chew on it through discussion that leads to application. And we need opportunities to get spiritual exercise too. That in part is what we do in our Wednesday evening as we gather to do the work of prayer.

This is the first reality that our text says that Christians living on milk must face. We must face *the problem* of spiritual immaturity. For time's sake, I'll mention the second, give the skeleton briefly, and the Lord willing we'll put on the flesh next time.

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

Listen to verses 1-3 (ESV), "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,² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ And this we will do if God permits."¹⁰

The writer actually surprises us by what he says next. 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." That's what Paul did with the Corinthians, telling them in 1 Corinthians 3:2, "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready."

But not so the writer of Hebrews. His readers needed milk, but notice what he tells them in verse 1, "Let us *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 grow up!¹¹

Let me reemphasize what I said earlier. 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've named the name of Christ for some time and you're still living on milk, this charge is for you. It's time to grow and go on to maturity.

But keep this in mind regarding maturity. Maturity involves a *process*, and we learn three insights about this process in verses 1-3.

A. We need a good doctrinal foundation. Notice the command in verse 1 (NIV), "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity." The writer urges his readers to *leave the elementary teachings*. But in order to leave them, that assumes something, right? You can't *leave* what you don't *have*. The writer assumes they had been taught and grasped *the elementary teachings about Christ*. The process of spiritual maturity begins by laying a good doctrinal foundation. But it doesn't end there.

¹⁰ In the NIV, "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, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so."

¹¹ I'm indebted to F. F. Bruce for this observation; p. 111.

B. We need more than a good foundation. Notice verse 1 again, “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on...” Go on to what? He’ll give us examples which we’ll consider next time.

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? Again, we’ll find out next time, the Lord willing.

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.”

Though many of us have seen pictures of a huge eagle's nest high in the branches of a tree or in the crag of a cliff, few of us have gotten a glimpse inside. When a mother eagle builds her nest she starts with thorns, broken branches, sharp rocks, and a number of other items that seem entirely unsuitable for the project. But then she lines the nest with a thick padding of wool, feathers, and fur from animals she has killed, making it soft and comfortable for the eggs. By the time the growing birds reach flying age, the comfort of the nest and the luxury of free meals make them quite reluctant to leave. That's when the mother eagle begins "stirring up the nest." With her strong talons she begins pulling up the thick carpet of fur and feathers, bringing the sharp rocks and branches to the surface. As more of the bedding gets plucked up, the nest becomes more uncomfortable for the young eagles. Eventually, this and other urgings prompt the growing eagles to leave their once-comfortable abode and move on to more mature behavior.¹²

Closing Song: #389 “More About Jesus” (all four verses)

What an appropriate song as we close our Bibles today. More about Jesus. There’s more to learn, always more, about Jesus.

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we began a two-part message from Hebrews 5:11-6:3, “*It’s Time to Stop Living on the Milk.*” After reading the passage again, discuss what initially stands out most to you.
2. Verse 11 begins, “About this we have much to say.” About what? What subject has the writer been discussing in the previous context? In the rest of verse 11 he says that this subject is “hard to explain”. What reason does he give for saying this?
3. In verse 12, we learn that the first readers of this epistle had a problem. What was their problem and what were the specific evidences of this problem?
4. In 1 Peter 2:2 Peter describes desiring the milk of the Word as a good thing. But in Hebrews 5:12 it’s not a good thing. What’s the difference? What is “milk” spiritually speaking? When is it good to receive spiritual milk? When is it not good?
5. According to verses 12-13, how can we tell if someone is spiritually *immature*? According to verse 14, how can we tell if someone is spiritually *mature*?
6. After discussing these questions, spend time as a group *praying the Word*. Have someone give thanks for this helpful (and painful) truth we’ve learned today. Have others offer requests for spiritual growth for those who are living on milk.

¹² *Today in the Word*, June 11, 1989.