

Rev. Seth D Bode + Sermon 279 + Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

### **CHRISTIANS MOVE ON TOWARD MATURITY**

*Second Lesson -- Hebrews 5:11-6:3*

11 We have much to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, because you have become too lazy to listen. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the beginning principles of God's word all over again. You have become people who need milk, not solid food. 13 For everyone who lives on milk is not acquainted with the word of righteousness, because he is still an infant. 14 But solid food is for mature people, who have their senses trained by practice to distinguish between good and evil. 6:1 Therefore, leaving the beginning discussion of Christ, let us press on toward matters that require greater maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, of faith in God, 2 of the teaching about baptisms, of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And we will do this, if God permits.

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Our 'baby book' tells me something new. By 4-6 months, babies are ready to eat solid foods. But by 12 months, the baby is grabbing for the spoon. I also found out that you let the baby, after a while, mom and dad are out of a job feeding. The baby will mature and be an official self-feeding, chewing baby.

God's church is the same way. He doesn't want his people to be babies and never eat properly enough to grow. But he's not talking about solid food for the body; He's talking about solid food for faith. He's talking about chewing on His Word enough in the heart and mind that we grow up in Him.

Here's what makes ... **God's Church of Chewing Christians**

#### **1. There is more for us to know**

God's Word is so simple that a small child can believe it, but so deep that a scholar can spend his whole life studying it. Did you know that? Salvation is for a very generic "whoever" ... "Whoever" believes has eternal life. Jesus wants the little children to come to Him. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Faith is a simple matter. But there is so much information, nuance, detail in the Bible that it takes more than a lifetime to learn it. How many times can you read a passage in the Bible and still get

meaning out of it, still see something new? My pastor when I grew up used to say he can reread a passage 20 times and still spots new truths. So there is more for us to know.

Add to that ... It is natural in a sincere relationship to want to know more about the other person. Doesn't that just make sense? Isn't it natural to ask more questions and get more information when you like to look at a person, be with a person, and like to hear that person talk? The Jackson-5 used to sing a song with the refrain, "A-B-C, 1-2-3, do-re-mi, you and me." But if you think that's an "education complete" and "that's how easy love can be," I have a car lease out in the parking lot I'd like you to look into with me after church ... A relationship is much more complicated, and often that's because the two parties in a relationship get so interested and invested in one another. Even if we make it more complicated, we don't stop loving to learn. You want to know more how the other person thinks and works and plays and acts, all their range of moods; and similarly you want to learn where they came from and where they're going, especially if that person can go alongside you in life.

The same goes for Christians who want a relationship with God. We want to know Him better. We want to go beyond the "beginning principles," as our text puts it. We don't want to be on the baby bottle our whole lives, but become a **CHEWING CHRISTIAN**. We have this Mary-like urge to learn at His feet whatever He might possibly offer in His revealed Word, the Bible. We desire what He has to feed us, and we become chewing Christians, longing for more of the solid food He has to give us.

Psalm 119:97,103 ... "Oh, how I love your laws! I meditate on them all day long. ... How sweet are your sayings to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" For the psalmist, learning more about God and loving God more isn't a bitter pill to swallow. It is like a dog-to-your-bone, constant gnawing until you eat it all up.

## **2. God wants us to grow**

Paul refers to the "beginning principles" in verse 2 with the word "foundation."

A strong foundation is meant to support a big building. In fact, if your building doesn't have a strong foundation -- if it's cracked, weak & shaky -- it can topple in the wind and rain, when the earth shakes, or when the world rumbles by. Instead, understand that NOT ONLY is it natural in just any relationship to grow, BUT God wants us to grow. He wants us to move beyond the A-B-Cs and get to understand things better and better. What are ?? the Christian's A-B-Cs ?? The writer to the Hebrews lists repenting of dead works, or sins. He lists baptism, laying on of hands (like baptismal prayers), Easter, and Judgment Day. There's more to Christianity than baptism, prayer, confirmation, Easter, and Judgment Day.

*But the devil and his allies don't want you to know that ... The devil and his allies want you to be (and remain) a baby.* They want you to be malnourished and stunted. They want you to keep at the easy stuff, the low-hanging fruit. They even want you to confidently think you have nothing more to learn. Your enemies want to keep you

content with the easiest of teachings. That way, when we are challenged and when we end up stuck in some very normal Christian problems, we won't know what to say or do. We won't be prepared to answer, we might actually doubt what little we do know, and then just babble like helpless infants.

If we could only see it how the devil sees it, we would almost laugh. There is a culture in the U.S. called paraphilic infantilism, adults who want to behave like babies. They are grown men and women who want to sleep in cribs, wear diapers, pop a pacifier in their mouths, drink from baby bottles, and talk baby talk. The excuse is that it's soothing and comforting; it takes them back to childhood.

People who actually do this probably have some background issues to chat about with a counselor. But people also do this in their Christian practice, and the result is just as ridiculous. To God and the devil alike, not being a chewing Christian and continuing to nurse and pander to your faith is like a grown adult climbing back into the crib, putting on diapers, popping in a pacifier, being cradled and held.

It is not only ridiculous but a threat to your faith. If your relationship with God's Word is seed on the hard path, as in hardly there, the devil can snatch our faith right off the hard path to heaven. The devil wants our roots to grow short and sickly so we can wither and crumble. The devil wants us to choke among the weeds and the worries and cares of the world so that we can suffer in his brand of eternity -- death forever in the darkness of hell.

1 Cor. 13:11 - "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things."

It was easy for the New Testament 'Hebrews' to go back to B.C. This letter was first written to ethnically Jewish Christians who lived (possibly in Rome) during the 1st century. And as you can imagine their old habits died hard. While they had heard the simple teachings of Jesus Christ and how He had fulfilled the Law by living perfectly; when they learned how He suffered for their sins by dying on the cross, they never really mastered it and they never really learned it. They still stuttered through their "foundational" A-B-Cs. If you grew up in the Old Testament Scriptures, you would also get to know how many sacrifices pointed to the one sacrifice for all; explore how many messianic prophecies Jesus answered; learn some final answers about Levites and priests; etc. Without seeing how Jesus tied up all those loose ends of the Old Testament, you might get caught up in the A-B-Cs again and go back to B.C.; religion before Christ, the sinner's status before Christ, the end of your life before or without Christ.

Therefore ... the writer to the Hebrews wanted them to train in telling good from evil. Remember when the devil tempted Eve in the garden? He told her she would be like God, knowing good from evil. That of course was NOT an utter lie, since she learned evil by experience. Actually it was a half-truth, now she would know BOTH good and evil. However, since the Fall into sin, we Christians need to learn and grow in faith to do

this, to tell the difference between good and evil. It is a training program to grow us in God's image. It demands self-discipline. It requires that we carve time out of life to practice Bible reading and personal devotion time.

Intentionally not developing is dangerous. In Christianity, it's proved time and time again that if you are not advancing, you are moving backwards in your faith. If you starve yourself in real life, your body will grow sick and weak and eventually die. If are starving yourself in God's Word and only getting a little bit, like just nursing on what's easy, your faith will shrivel. Why? The world surrounds us with other things that we love to do. Doubts and insecurities hammer away at us, and we're usually subconsciously under attack. Doubt and unbelief happens when we don't expect it, and if we are Christians who battle an inner sinner like the Hebrews, not putting our faith in God for a number of things adds up to unbelief. Then insistent unbelief dulls our ears and our consciences. Then we have chased even the Holy Spirit out of our hearts, which means no faith and no repentance, no eternal life ... even a warning that such unbelievers won't get another chance, even as it falls on deaf ears.

God says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" [2 Pet. 3:18]. "Become mature, with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray" (Eph. 4:13-14).

So how can we follow the same instructions? First, repent of your "dead works," meaning your sins -- the times that you coddled and babied your Christian faith. Second, remember your baptism and all of its promises. Third, if you are confirmed, come to the table, often. Fourth, build on your foundational, "beginning principles." Come to Bible class; teens, come to our teen study; bring the children to Sunday school. Not everyone can offer as great a program as we have, I can assure you. Take advantage of God's Word, at this church and at home, and your faith will grow. Eat it up hungrily and you will not need warnings like Hebrews chapter 5.

Then you won't be so easy to be plucked and carried off. Then you can pick up the full armor of God, unlike a baby, and actually protect yourself. Then you can defend against the devil, and even assail his gates yourself, when you're prepared to answer after you're asked for all your hopeful reasons to live and love God.

Case in point: That moment when ... more than one biblical principle applies. Let me use the Hebrew midwives at Moses' time in the beginning of Exodus, for example. They were told to let the Egyptians know when a baby is born so they could put it to death. The fourth commandment would determine we follow the government on this one, and the eighth commandment would mean we do not lie. But the fifth commandment was more important, that these Hebrew midwives would not let the babies be slaughtered, so they lied and disobeyed the government. Not an unchristian thing to do, considering the circumstances, but if they had been spiritual babies themselves, they may not have reached such a faithful conclusion.

Another case in point: That moment when God has neither commanded nor forbidden something. Labeling something *adiaphora*, we often figure that means there is no wrong answer. But labeling the *adiaphora* is only the beginning of the discussion. Next we want to decide what it affects, what is wise and constructive and beneficial and builds up. We can still sin in matters of *adiaphora* by ignoring God's words. We can often choose between good and better in the same circumstance.

Of course the quintessential example for chewing Christians comes from Jesus Himself. He was often committed to His human faculties, instead of making use of His divine knowledge. He grew and matured, and He did this so well that He was impressing teachers in the temple. Early in His ministry, when they marveled at His powers of all-knowing, He promised they would see greater things than that. To His dying breath He was seeking the Father's will. He chewed and chewed and chewed until the devil's plans were broken and defeated, and so Jesus was a hungry dog in the fight for our salvation. Like a dog to a bone, Jesus ate the devil's homework. He did so that we might be renewed in our chewing. It takes a chewing Christian to really explore what God wants us to know, so let us look to Jesus when we need forgiveness for being babies; and let us look to Jesus to chew some more. Amen.