

# The Final Word of Warning Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2014

## Intro

In the movie 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button' the main character is born as an old man who gets younger and younger throughout the story until he becomes a baby.

While the people around him grow older and more mature, he becomes less and less mature and eventually ceases to exist.

Benjamin Button's life is a life going the wrong way.

We start off as infants who need to learn how to eat, walk, talk and do everything else that we need to be able to do to live.

But we grow and mature as we get older.

For those of us who are parents, we long to see our children growing and maturing into adult people.

Well, living as a Christian works the same way – we're meant to keep growing and maturing as we get 'older'... i.e. the longer we've been a Christian.

But what does that mean? What is 'Christian maturity'? And why is it important? How do we become mature and keep maturing as Christians?

That's what we'll seek to find out as we look at some encouragements and a warning in this section of Hebrews.

## Gospel-fed thinking and living

In 5:11-14 the writer is pretty direct with his readers about their immaturity.

He says there's much more to be said about Jesus – who he is and what he's done and what it means for us.

But they're slow to learn. The words 'slow to learn' mean 'hard of hearing' – not that there was anything wrong with their ears – but they weren't listening.

They'd been Christians for a while.

It was reasonable to expect that they should be able to teach one another and others about being Christians by this stage.

But they were like babies in adult bodies as far as living as Christians went.

They needed to be fed milk like babies.

They kept needing to hear 'remember you're a Christian'... over and over. They weren't moving on.

They kept needing to be taught that ignoring God is wrong and that they need to listen to the gospel.

They were still baby Christians who didn't have any focus on growing up.

[If you're a young Christian, don't think this is criticising you! We're all at different stages of maturity – which is why it's important for us to be able to teach each other].

But while you remain a baby Christian, you won't be able to digest the solid food that v13 calls the 'teaching about righteousness'.

The distinction between 'infant' and 'mature' doesn't mean 'big thicko' and 'professor'.

It's simply the distinction between people who are seeking – as v14 says – to train themselves through constant use of God's word to distinguish good from evil.

That doesn't mean 'how to do everything right'. It means (as Paul says in Philippians 1:27) how to live in a manner worthy of the gospel... how to live out what the gospel means for every thought, word, decision, plan and action.

Mature Christians are people who train themselves through constant reading, hearing, reflecting on and thinking about God's word.

They equip themselves and each other to live their lives believing and trusting Jesus with all they are and all they have.

They train themselves to be able to distinguish between the good that God would have them do and the evil that we're naturally inclined to do in our sinfulness.

And the writer says 'this is where you should be at by now – you should be familiar enough with what you've heard and learnt to be able to know how God wants you to live.' But they're not.

Every time they come to church they have to be taught the basics – they had to keep being taught 'turn away from sin, and turn to Christ'.

But in 6:1 it says

*“Therefore let us leave the elemental 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, etc....”*

What that is NOT saying is that we somehow don't need the gospel anymore – that would contradict what it says in 2:1 about paying more careful attention to what we've heard.

In fact, that verse helps us understand what this one means – that we can't just hear the gospel and not progress from it.

Illustration:

When our boys learned to play the guitar, they started with me teaching them the basics of how to hold it, how to play a couple of chords, etc.

But then we sent them to get some proper lessons. And they started learning the basics of the fret board, scales, how to put notes together into a melody, time signatures... all those things.

It took them a little while to get all the elements together. But once they had those elemental teachings under their belts, they became able to make great music.

Here's a bit of something Murray recorded a few weeks ago...

When he plays like that, he doesn't have to keep going back to 'what does a black dot on the second line mean?' or remind himself of what the third note is in the scale of C.

He hasn't forgotten any of those basics... but now they're just part of how his brain and body work – right down to the muscle memory that just puts his fingers where they need to be on the guitar and the right tension on his vocal chords to sing the notes.

If he had to be reminded of the basics every time he plays, all you would hear from him would be scales.

But because he knows those basics so thoroughly well, his playing is beautiful music.

And if he constantly had to be reminded of the basics, he wouldn't be able to teach anyone else like he does. He'd still need to be taught the basics himself.

6:1 means that the elementary or foundational teaching of turning away from sin and trusting in Jesus need to become so thoroughly ingrained in us that our lives become more and more like beautiful music... that we don't spend our lives looking like a beginner practising the scales.

We shouldn't keep needing to be told that Jesus Christ must be the centre of our lives as if we've never heard it before.

Instead, that truth of who Jesus is and what he's done should be the most basic thing in our lives.

The gospel should be so much a part of who we are that there's nothing in our lives that it won't affect...

... the way we talk... the way we treat people who are harsh with us... our decision each Sunday about what we'll do with the day...

how I think about money... deciding where to live... whether it's important to be in a Growth Group...

whether I think about church as somewhere I come to serve others... the importance you give to passing the gospel on to others...

whether you get up early enough to read a bit of the Bible and pray before your day starts... whether you'll make someone a cup of tea without being asked...

The word of God centred in the gospel has something to say about every part of your life.

Christian maturity is knowing the gospel so well that what God would have you do in everything will become more and more – not second nature – but your growing new nature.

But for that maturity to come – to go on to maturity as v1 says – we need to put in the effort, with God's help, into training ourselves through the constant use of God's word to know our foundation so well that mature Christian thinking, speaking and acting increasingly flow out of us like beautiful music.

Maturity is a process... we won't be fully mature until Jesus returns or calls us home... we'll continue to struggle against our sinfulness as we seek to grow.

But there's never a point this side of heaven when we shouldn't be growing and maturing as Christians. I know God has given me plenty of opportunity to grow in my faith in Jesus this year.

### **Gospel Warning**

The question we need to ask ourselves is "is it your desire to move to maturity as a Christian?"

Because there's a warning beginning in v4 for anyone who thinks it's ok to stay as a baby Christian.

If I can keep the music illustration going, our son has been teaching guitar for about 9 years.

Some of his students have been a great joy to him – kids who've come to grips with the basics who've gone home and practised and become more familiar with the basics and have learned how to put that into their playing.

It's obvious they've done like he did – once the basics have become second nature to them, they can't put the guitar down – they just keep finding more ways to put them into their playing.

But others have come each week who've paid their money to be taught the same basics over and over.

They go away from the lesson never intending to revise and practise through the week. I've heard them sit in our lounge room week after week picking away at tunes that you can't even recognise.

They didn't have the desire to mature as players. And so they didn't spend the time and energy needed to mature their playing.

But you know what happens to those students, don't you? Eventually, they give up. If their playing doesn't progress, it goes backwards.

And the same is true for us as Christians.

If we don't have the desire to grow to maturity, it means we haven't grasped what being a Christian is about...

... that it's about being restored (as we saw earlier in Hebrews) to the people God made us to be – to be like Jesus.

To say "I'm happy the way I am" means you've turned the gospel into something that affirms you in your sinfulness.

God accepts us as we are, but he doesn't leave us where we are.

Our full maturity is to be and live like Jesus – that's why he came! That's God's plan. Is it yours?

If it's not, the warning in verses 4-6 is sobering.

They're difficult verses because they warn us that there's a danger of God's judgment for believers who don't want to mature.

There's a real threat of missing out on the promise of God's rest – remember that God's rest is people restored to be like Jesus, living with God in his restored Creation.

You might ask how that can be when we read in John 10:28 that nothing can snatch the people God has given to Jesus out of his hand.

But remember the context of that is Jesus saying "my sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."

And that's the point of the warning here and throughout Hebrews – keep listening to Jesus – keep listening to the gospel, and you won't fall away.

But if you've heard the gospel and don't really want what God promises in it, then you're acting like the land in the parable in verses 7-8 that, although it's well watered, it produces only weeds, and in the end is cursed.

But the writer of Hebrews has greater hopes for his readers.

There's still time to change. In v9 he's confident of seeing things that accompany salvation in their lives.

That is, he's confident of seeing growing maturity. He's seen it already. And he's confident he'll see them continue to grow as they heed this warning, and change direction – to stop drifting away.

That will only happen as they – and we – keep listening to God's final and greatest word to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ... and constantly using that word that is at the heart of the Bible to train ourselves to live lives centred on Christ.

...and as we teach each other as we discover together more and more of how God's grace in the gospel transforms life for the better.

## **Conclusion**

Let's take this warning not to remain as immature Christians to heart.

Pray that God will give you, me and all of us a great desire to keep growing to Christian maturity – to be more and more like Jesus.