

Today, we're going to be talking about spiritual maturity – maturing as a Christian.

When you first hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and become a Christian, everything is new. Everything is new, and everything changes. Living the Christian life – living as a Disciple of Jesus, is so spectacularly different to the culture of the world.

And so, the things we now:

- long for, are very different;
- hope for, are very different;
- believe/know, are very different;
- love, are very different;
- work for/invest in, are very different.

You see, our culture (the Australian culture), very often identifies something that is evil, as being “good”, and what is good, it thinks is “evil”. But when our eyes are opened to the reality of God, and when our ears begin to absorb God's word – that unchangeable and unchallengeable eternal truth of righteousness.... and as we begin to grasp the power of God (even the power to raise the dead),,, our faith sprouts/grows/matures...

Now, it seems to me, that at this point in Hebrews, it may be addressing a group of people (maybe academics), who are way too clever for their own good.

You see, he's talking to a group of people, who he says “By now, you lot should be teachers”... Alright, so at this point,

we know he's not talking to the whole of the church. Within the church, we all have different gifts, and we're all given different tasks (different ministries)... because that's how the body of Christ works.

We are all different parts, forming the one body, and so, we serve in different ways.

Some:

- are teachers;
- are worship leaders;
- are gifted in the way they pray;
- have gifts of hospitality;
- serve in practical ways;
- have gifts of prophecy;
- wisdom...

And together, as the body, we function. And that's the way God has designed us to be.

But he says to this group, "By now, you should be teachers"... Alright, it's a group of people who have been given the capacity to teach. But there is absolutely no way (at this point) that they can be teachers. Why not? Because they've turned away from the very basics of the Gospel – the truths that our faith is built upon.

It would be like a university lecturer in mathematics who works on some of the world's most complex theories and formulas... But then he entertains different ideas about the times tables...

The times tables (for him) are no longer an unchangeable truth ... $6 \times 7 = 42$ How basic are you. We're now going to use 67... And so he constructs his complex formula, but in using it, he doesn't follow the basic truths of mathematics.

That would be absurd, wouldn't it...

And just as absurd, is to begin to consider deep spiritual things of God, at the abandonment of the basics of the Gospel.

And I have seen this happen. I'm sad to say, I've seen it many times... Where a splinter-group in the church get a passion for a certain philosophy or a social cause,,, and they construct a whole theology around their passion, and in doing so, they discard the basic truths of the Gospel.

I met a man once, who was in leadership in a church, and as we talked about the things of God, and worshipping God and following God, and the way that God speaks to us through His Word,,,, we just couldn't connect. He'd say, "I just don't understand what you're saying", and so I would explain it again... And I would explain it so simple, that most of our Sunday School kids would get it... And he'd just shake his head, and say, "It just doesn't make sense"...

Now, this is the bloke I thought of, when I read V11 said:

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

And eventually I worked out why this bloke didn't get it... He said, "Michael, you need to understand that a few years ago,

my eyes were opened, and I no longer believe what I was taught in Sunday School....”

And he went on to tell me, that he’s now embraced what he called “Progressive Christianity”... “In this day and age, you can’t expect people to believe that sort of rubbish any more...”

He was an older man, but he said “If you want young people in the church, we have to become progressive in what we believe”.

*And he told me how what he had learned in Sunday School and what **I** believe, was something that was constructed for simpletons in ancient times to believe, because they didn’t know any better...*

But now he and the group of academics he’s connected with, have this new progressive theology.

And as he described what he believed, well, it was more about what he didn’t believe.

He no longer believed:

- *in the virgin birth;*
- *that God would ever send his Son to die for us (child abuse);*
- *Jesus is raised from the dead...*

And basically the god he believes in, has no spiritual power, and no higher purpose, and actually the only place that god exists, is in our minds... And the pinnacle of his belief, was that the person manifests god, when they do good for another person...

What it was, was a high-falutin academic demolition of truth, and an embracing of empty philosophy... And they had the hide to call it “Progressive Christianity”... And I’ve met numerous people since then, who have gone exactly the same way, and they’ve emptied the gospel of everything that *is* Gospel....

And these sorts of people, see themselves as “the wise”, and as “teachers”. But, there was absolutely no way that they can be teachers in the church, why? Because in their “great learning”, they had completely lost the primary truth of the Gospel.

Alright, so that’s a simple modern-day example.

But there’s lots of other examples. Some who should be teachers, get more fun out of:

- asking curly questions, for the sake of being contentious; or
- creating fancy arguments, because rather than teaching simple truth, they get more delight out of displaying their cleverness...; or
- they branch off into some weird and wacky numerology, or prophecy...

And they try to come across as being “very knowledgeable” in these things, but in their “great learning”, they’ve strayed from what’s important.

And so, Hebrews is saying to this group (who had the capacity to be teachers), “I **want** to teach you deeper things, and God-willing, we will... But at the moment, I find I’ve gotta go over the basics all over again”... It was obvious that they wanted more solid food, but they hadn’t yet digested the basics of the Gospel....

Do you understand what he’s saying? When you **first** become a Christian, we’ve gotta start out on the milk – we need to learn what the basics of Christianity are:

The foundation is the elementary doctrine of Christ:

- repentance – repentance from dead works
(In other words, doing things that lead to death).
Repent of wrong-doing/our rejection of Christ.
Even repenting of trying to earn our own salvation,
instead of trusting in Christ.

And the foundation:

- of having faith toward God.
- “Washings” (Baptism);
- Laying on of hands – that’s when we pray for a person to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the basics of Christianity include learning about:

- the resurrection of the dead; and
- eternal judgment

Do you realise what he's saying? He's saying "That's the milk. And there's deeper things I want you to learn about..."...

He refers to the deeper things as "Solid food". ... "**solid food is for the mature**", he says. Well, who's that?

Well, I want you to know, being "spiritual mature" doesn't depend on how old you are, and it doesn't depend on how long you've been a Christian. Spiritual maturity is about drinking in God's word, and putting it into action, day, after day, after day. – That's how we get spiritually mature.

He gives an example from farming. Land that takes in the rain, that falls on it often, produces a useful crop...

So, there's three parts to this: Regular rainfall; a soil that will actually take in the rainfall; and the crop the land grows.

On the Darling Downs, you'll find some of the best soils in the world. Deep, self-mulching soil. That means it cracks, and it's friable, and the water runs in to the soil and fills up the whole profile... Spiritually, you want to be like a beautiful self-mulching clay, or a nice sandy loam – something that will take in the word of God...

*But I'll tell you what you don't want to be. You **don't** want to be like the soil you'll find around Yelarbon. It's known as the Yelarbon desert. And it gets just as much rainfall as anywhere*

else nearby, but it's hard, and it seals off... It doesn't matter how much rain falls on that soil – almost none of it gets in...

But even on soil that does take in the rain,, if it grows a good crop, that's fantastic. But V8 says: ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

So, when we drink in the Word of God, what are we going to produce? A useful crop? or thorns and thistles? What's the difference?

Well 5:14 tells us that the Spiritually Mature **have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

What that means, is that when we live by the Word of God (every day), there's training in that. And as we constantly identify our choices in life (good vs evil), what is being trained in us, is a power of spiritual discernment... And as we make decisions in the little things (easy things), it helps us to develop Godly discernment, in the more difficult issues...

Let me put legs on that:

When we think about ethics (What is right and what is wrong – good/evil – how should I live?)... With some things, the Word of God is very explicit (easy to understand).

So, if I'm a Christian, is that OK to get drunk? No, that's not OK. The Word of God tells us that there will be no drunkards in the Kingdom of God....

Or if I swear and use foul language (maybe just in the sheep yards)... everybody swears. Is that OK? No, that's not OK. What comes out of my mouth, is a sign of what's in my heart. And so, if foulness, is coming out in my words, that's a pretty good indicator that there is something foul in my heart...

If I need a pen and there's a box of pens at work, is it OK for me to take that pen home and keep it as if it is mine? No, because God's word says "Thou shalt not steal".

Alright, those things are easy – It's a no brainer...

But, what about issues that are not directly addressed?

Like when it comes to IVF... The Scriptures don't directly answer that one. IVF was never even thought of...

Or what about superannuation and preparing for my retirement... How does that fit with giving to those who are in need, and the warning to "Don't store up treasures on earth". And yet, if I give it all away, I'll end up free-loading off everybody else, and that's not Godly either.....

How do we discern what is right, on these big questions in life??? I'll tell you how: **by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

As we drink in the Word of God, and as we live by the Word of God and live by the Spirit, we will be constantly putting into practice – sorting out good from evil, so that we can choose to live in Godliness.

And as we do this with the simple things, it prepares us to grapple with the big issues.

So, in the context of this, the soil with the thorns and thistles, is to be dull of hearing – not really be taking in the things of God. And I think the thorns and thistles, represent 2 things. They represent:

1. a person who does not choose well between good and evil; and
2. a theology that rejects the basic truths of the Gospel:
 - repentance;
 - faith;
 - baptism;
 - being filled with the Holy Spirit;
 - the resurrection of the dead;
 - the coming judgment...

Spiritual maturity holds on to the basic, unchanging truths of the Gospel, and it is a life that chooses well, between good and evil.

- Drinking in the word of God (often);
- Soaking it in; and
- living it.

Now, in the Scriptures, “thorns” and “thistles” (bad fruit), are images of:

- false teachers/prophetsⁱ;
- pursuing wealth and worldliness instead of the things of Godⁱⁱ;

And here, it’s given as a warning, that the outcome of these things, is destruction. If the land bears thorns & thistles, it’s **worthless** and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

And that fits with this whole section of Hebrews, where there is a recurring theme, of holding onto our faith, and obeying the word of God. And today’s reading makes the point, that if a person strays too far from their faith, and if they abandon faith in Christ altogether, there is no coming back.... That’s a scary thought....

It says V4:

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who

- have once been enlightened,
- who have tasted the heavenly gift, and
- have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and
- have tasted the goodness of the word of God
- and the powers of the age to come,

(alright, so this is a person who has definitely become a Christian).

⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Alright, if a person **completely** falls away, there is no coming back. It is impossible. And that's why it is so important, that if a believer begins on a path, slipping away from the faith, it's so important, **to restore them again to repentance**. And if they **are** restored again to repentance, Pheww!!!, that was close... because if they get too far down the road of unbelief, it gets to the stage where they are so hardened (and their rejection of Christ becomes so complete), repentance (for them) becomes an impossibility.

But the writer to the Hebrews, has confidence, that his readers haven't fallen that far. He was confident in 2 things:

1. That God is just; and
2. he could see that their actions were an expression of their faith (**things that belong to salvation**).

God is not unjust He won't overlook the evidence of your faith. Your work (the way you serve), and the love that you have for other Christians....

And for me, V11 brings out a path to spiritual maturity.

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

You see, if drinking in the Word of God, and putting it into action, is what develops spiritual maturity, the practical demonstration of this, is:

- holding fast to our faith until the end;
- servanthood; and
- loving one another...

And so, if I want to become more spiritually mature, and if I want to have a full assurance that:

- “Hey yeah, I am in the faith;
- I am a Disciple of Jesus;
- I do have this heavenly calling;
- I will make it through to the end”,

get real about your faith. It’s as simple as that.

You **know** people who are spiritually mature. Do what they do. And you know people who are “sluggish” in the Christian faith. **Don’t** do what they do...

It's not rocket science.

And I want to assure you, that people of faith, have a sureness and a certainty of God’s promise.

And to help us to understand this, Hebrews gives us the example of Abraham. God made a promise to Abraham.

Now, I’m actually a “Commissioner of Declarations” (sounds very important, doesn’t it)... What that means is, when you have a very important document to sign, I can witness it (the same as a JP can). And some documents are so important, that at their signing, I have to administer an Oath. And when

an Oath is given, by the Law, there is no greater testimony to the truth.

Now, when God made this promise to Abraham, He made an oath upon His Own Name, because there is no one higher than God. The promise that God made Abraham, was that He would bless Abraham, and multiply His descendants...

But for Abraham to receive the promise, meant that he had to trust in the promise of God, and keep on trusting in the promise of God. Longsuffering patience is the term...

And it's the same for us. God has promised you and I, eternal salvation, and it's impossible for God to lie... And so, we do what Abraham did: **Through faith and patience [we] inherit the promises.**

We have fled the old life, and found refuge in Him. And this becomes the anchor – **a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul...** And V19 says that it is **a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain**

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The curtain had always symbolised the barrier between sinful man and Holy God. If you went behind that curtain, you died.

And the great hope that we have, is not just that we will live forever – so what: having an eternity of the same miserable existence... No way. The great hope that **we** have – the anchor that holds us strong in our faith, is the promise we

have, to leave behind the miserable part of our existence, and be in fellowship, in the presence of our loving, Holy, Heavenly Father...

We get to go behind the curtain, and not die.

Spiritual Maturity, is to live, tethered to that anchor. (seek first the Kingdom of God & His righteousness...)...

The Spiritually Mature, drink in the Word of God, and make a practice of living in accordance with His Word. Why do we do that? We do it, because we are anchored to that exact same thing. This is what we are working towards – this is what we hope for. So, why wouldn't we want to live it now?

And Spiritual Maturity, enables us to consider, the deeper things of God. The basics of the Christian faith – We learn those, right at the beginning:

- repentance;
- faith;
- baptism;
- being filled with the Holy Spirit;
- the resurrection of the dead;
- the coming judgment...

“Going deeper” – getting on to the meat, means “the basics” are firmly set in our minds – these things are the eternal truths of God... And so, we're ready to go deeper into God's Word. And God-willing, we will.

Let's pray:

Lord, our prayer today,
is, “Take us deeper”.

Lord, we believe.
Help us to drink in Your Word.
Help us to live Your Word.
And we long for the day,
when we will go where Christ has gone,
and go behind that curtain,
into Your loving, eternal presence.

Tether us to this Lord,
as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul

in Jesus' Name.
Amen.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the father,
and He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 7:16
ⁱⁱ Parable of the sower