

# Raising the Dead / Growing the Living

Hebrews 5:11- 6:2

This morning we are going to look at five stages in a person's spiritual journey with God. The first stage is when we are spiritually dead. According to **Ephesians 2:1-3**, we all start out in that stage,

“As for you [the believers at Ephesus], you were dead in your transgressions and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world [world in this context is referring to a self-centered, detached from God, way of thinking, which is] . . . now at work in those who are disobedient.<sup>3</sup> **All of us** also lived among them [the spiritually dead] at one time.”

This may surprise you, but the first death spoken of in the Bible – is spiritual death, not physical death. Hear what God told Adam in **Genesis 2:16-17**, after He brought him into the garden,

“And the LORD God commanded the man [Adam], saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;<sup>17</sup> but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”

Did Adam and Eve die physically the day they rebelled at God's command and ate of that tree? No, they died spiritually – which means they became separated from their fellowship with God. Their physical deaths did not occur until much later.

And so what characterizes spiritually dead people? Unbelief and disobedience to God. The unbelief of spiritually dead people may be as extreme as atheism, which claims there is no God. The Bible never tries to combat atheism with philosophical arguments. Nor did Jesus try to prove the existence of God. Jesus did His miracles to show that He is the Son of God. And when you think about it, it is tough to be the Son of God – if there is no God. Jesus also understood that everyone innately knows there is a God. **Hebrews 3:4** declares, “For every house is built by someone [anyone disagree with that?], but the builder of all things is God.” Neither should anyone disagree with that statement.

Atheism is an extreme manifestation of unbelief, but the more common manifestation of unbelief is the notion that fallen people can gain God's approval by means of their own efforts. For example, how did Adam and Eve try to cover their nakedness and guilt? By making themselves fig leaf garments. Did those efforts restore their fellowship with God? No. When

God showed up in the Garden, they went into hiding. The Bible refers to our self-efforts to gain God's approval as – dead works [Hebrews 6:1].

What did Jesus do to help people who futilely believed they could earn eternal life by good works? We are given an example in **Luke 18:18-21**,

“A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?’ . . . <sup>20</sup> [Jesus answered] ‘You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.”<sup>21</sup> **‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said.**”

Liar, liar, pants on fire. Was that guy actually claiming that he had never lipped off to his mom or dad when he was growing up? I can guarantee you he did. Why did Jesus direct that man to God's Moral Law? He did so because one of the purposes of God's Law is to authoritatively communicate to mankind God's holy standards of right and wrong – which then reveals our sin and shows us our need for a Savior.

In Jesus' day the Rabbis had dulled that function of God's Moral Law by encapsulating God's Law with their own traditions and false interpretations. Even Saul of Tarsus, when he was under the spell of the Rabbis, thought he was blameless before God's Law [Philippians 3:4-6]. However, after Saul met the ascended Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus, he saw himself as the “chief of sinners” [I Timothy 1:15]. Whenever anyone in the Bible was given a clear vision of God – they walked away with a deep conviction of their sinfulness.

In a similar way, when God's Moral Law isn't dulled and diluted with man-made interpretations, it has the supernatural ability to convict people of their sin. I recently watched the evangelist Ray Comfort ask people if they believed they are going to heaven? Most of them said yes. But then he followed that question with, “Have you ever lied?” “Have you ever stolen?” “Have you ever taken God's name in vain?” These once confident people become convicted of their sin.

This is why when John Wesley did open air evangelism, 90% of his message was on God's Law. Why? Because after teaching God's Moral Law, his audience was much more convinced that they needed the good news of the gospel. Faith in the person and work of Christ is not one of many ways to heaven – it is the only way that fallen man can enter into eternal life.

Let's move on to the second stage of man's spiritual condition before God. When by God's

grace – people repent and trust in Christ, they become new creations, BUT they are spiritual infants. What characterizes new-born babies? They are dependent upon adults, and they are ignorant. Babies have a great capacity to learn, but if they do not use that capacity, they will always remain dependant and ignorant. The Bible speaks about **spiritual infants** in Hebrews 5:11-14. I hope you will open your Bibles to that text,

“We have much to say about this [how the Old Testament priest and king named Melchizedek was a shadow of Christ], but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn [lazy].<sup>12</sup> In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the [abc] elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!<sup>13</sup> Anyone who lives on milk, being still an [spiritual] infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

In this passage the writer of Hebrews specifically addresses Christians in the infant stage of development. How does he describe them? They are spiritually ignorant. And what do they need to do? They need to stop being lazy and get with a mature Christian who can explain to them the basic truths of the faith. Infant Christians also need mature Christians to teach and model for them the proper conduct and habits of the Christians faith. Let me give you an example of the Apostle Paul teaching a basic truth and proper conduct. Listen to **Ephesians 4:28**,

“Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.”

Paul not only taught that truth to the new believers at Thessalonica, but he also modeled it for them. He made tents during the day to support himself and then taught them at night. He made sacrifices so that he could pour his life into those baby believers. Acts 17 informs us that Paul may of only had three weeks at Thessalonica before the unbelieving Jews drove him out of town. But before Paul was driven out of town, he also taught another basic truth about Christian conduct. It is recorded in

**I Thessalonians 4:1-8**,

“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God . . .<sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.<sup>3</sup> It is God’s will that . . . you should avoid sexual immorality . . .<sup>8</sup> he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God . . .”

Thievery, laziness and immorality are not new. They have a long and dishonorable

history. And so Christians must learn to put off the old and put on the new.

The next stage of growth after infancy is childhood, which is still characterized by self-centeredness. Christians in the child stage need to be connected to God by having mature Christians teach them how to feed themselves from God's Word. Friends, if we only eat one meal a week, we are not going to do well physically. And if we only feed our souls on Sunday mornings, we are not going to do well spiritually.

Christians in the child stage of growth also need to be connected to a small group of believers, with at least one mature Christian in the group. This is the setting where a Christian child can ask questions, learn to think Biblically, be authentic about their struggles and pray for others – which gets their self-centered minds off themselves and onto serving others – which eventually becomes their mission in life.

This brings us to the adult stage of the Christian life. This stage is characterized by a growing desire to serve others in ways that glorify God. Adult Christians have learned to sacrifice in order to meet pressing needs. Adult Christians understand that they are called by God to use their gifts and abilities to help extend Christ's Kingdom on earth. If they do not use their time and talents to help others, they will not progress to the next stage and may even drop back into the childhood stage.

You might be asking yourself, what other stage is there beyond being a Christian adult? The last stage is called parents. These are Christians who are actively involved in helping people to know Christ and grow in Christ – to the point where the people they work with can also help others know Christ and grow in Christ. Parent Christians think in terms of what a team of people working together can accomplish for Christ's kingdom. We should all desire to be parent Christians.

Are we ever going to stop growing in Christ? No. Which means we must get into the meat of God's Word and not stay on milk or even soft foods. Why is that important? Let's look again at **Hebrews 5:14**, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." There is a serious lack of this kind of maturity in our churches today. Many Christians never build upon the foundational truths of our faith. These foundational truths are extremely important but they are meant to be built upon. Let me show you this from Hebrews 6:1-2,

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity [adult, parent Christianity], not laying again a foundation of **(1) repentance from dead works** [dead works refer to our own efforts to justify ourselves before God. We will never put our trust in Christ if we do not repent of the notion that we can fix ourselves], **and of (2) faith in God** [only by trusting in God’s provision for our sin, can we enter into eternal life], <sup>2</sup> **(3) instruction about baptisms** [this is referring to the Old Testament washing rituals and New Testament water baptism, which are all designed to point to our need for inner cleansing – which can only be experienced through faith in Christ], **(4) the laying on of hands** [Jewish people did this whenever they offered an animal sacrifice for their sin. They would lay their hands on the head of an unblemished male sheep or bull, confessing their sin, which was transferred to the animal, which then died in their place. Who was this designed to point to? The perfect sacrifice of the sinless Son of God], **(5) the resurrection of the dead, and (6) eternal judgment.**”

These last two truths refer to the Great Day of Judgment, which will occur when Christ returns to raise the dead and finalize eternal destinies. Everyone should live their lives with that Day in mind, because all of us will stand before God – both those who are alive at Christ’s coming and those who have died. Some will hear on that day, “Well done My good and faithful servant” and others will hear “Depart from me you who practice lawlessness.” The ones who hear “Well done” – will be in glorified bodies that never experience disease, old age, or pain.

How to enter into eternal life is enormously important. But regeneration, which puts us on the foundation we just spoke about, is the beginning of the Christian life, not the end of it. We are all to grow up in Christ by building more Biblical truths upon that foundation. We need to learn what the Bible teaches about God and how individuals and families are to conduct themselves before God. But even beyond that, the Bible teaches how communities and nations can live at peace with one another and with God.

And friends, the Moral Law of God provides the path that individuals, families, communities and nations are to follow. If we get sidetracked by false systems of ethics, or economics, or civil government, then we must repent and get back on the right path.

When Christ taught His disciples to teach the peoples of the nations to obey everything He had taught them, the Moral Law of God was smack in the middle of that. Let me be clear, we are not under the Ceremonial Division of God’s Law, which required animal sacrifices. But the Moral Law of God, summarized by the Ten Commandments, is the standard of right and wrong for all peoples of all nations for all ages. And if God’s Law is not the standard, then what is?

Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, who were champions of Socialism and Communism,

rejected God's Law – because they didn't believe there is a God. And today atheism is still the official belief of both of those economic, governmental train wrecks, which claim the Ten Commandments were concocted by upper middle-class people, in order to hold down the lower classes. The men had contempt for God's Law. And because most churches do not teach what the Bible says about civil government, we have millions of people in churches that are enamored with Socialism and try to dress it in Christian clothing. Friends, a Biblical view of civil government teaches it is to be limited in its size and scope. Socialism teaches a civil government that is large and intrusive. To try and dress Socialism into Christian clothing is like putting a frilly tutu on a 500 pound gorilla – it is not a pretty sight.

Sadly, many mainline churches no longer believe the Bible is God's inspired Word, which means they no longer respect Bible or seriously study it. Because of that, their worldview is all over the map. In a very bizarre way they have become enamored with the sexual immorality of transgenders and homosexuals. So they try to dress those lifestyles in Christian clothing. It is a futile effort.

Christians desperately need to develop a Biblical Worldview. Yes, that will take a thorough study of God's Word, where we connect the dots between the Old and New Testaments – so that we get the full counsel of God's Word. The Bible never contradicts itself, because truth doesn't contradict truth. It is time that churches get off the milk of God's Word and start chewing on the meat of God's Word, so that we can once again distinguish good from evil. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, the problem of our culture is not the prevalence of darkness. It is the scarcity of light, which always overcomes darkness. We pray that more and more people will come to know Christ and then grow in Christ until they become parent Christians who help others to know Christ and grow in Christ. Help us to be the true descendants of Abraham, who bless all the nations of the earth by teaching them to observe everything Christ has commanded us.