**Grow Up!** Hebrews 5:11-6:3 [www.bible-sermons.org](http://www.bible-sermons.org) June 19, 2016

The letter to the Hebrew believers has made a case from Scripture for the supremacy and majesty of Christ and the privileges we have in Him. The argument has been punctuated by some warnings. The first is found in the beginning of chapter two. We are warned to pay more careful attention to what we have heard or been taught (Hebrews 2:1-3). We are repeatedly warned against hardening our hearts lest we fail to enter God’s rest (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7). He has also warned them against the consequences of unbelief and disobedience (Hebrews 3:18-19).

Our passage today is another warning which is related to the previous warnings. Today we will cover the first half of the warning against apostasy. If any of the previous warnings were not taken seriously, they would end up failing to heed this most serious of warnings.

The author had just explained about the eternal priesthood of Jesus and the privileges it affords us. He continues in verse eleven, *11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.* Hebrews 5:11 What he wants to tell them isn’t hard to explain to the willing listener who is hungry to understand the blessings we have in Christ. It is only hard to explain to those who have become dull of hearing. This was the same problem the Jews had in the wilderness, as well as in those last days of the nation. They had become stiffnecked, meaning that they would not turn to listen when God called to them through the prophets (2 Chronicles 30:8; Jeremiah 11:10). They refused to hear the warnings God was giving them in love. They had chosen to go their own way and would not heed the prophets warning calls to turn back and repent lest they go into captivity.

The Hebrew believers that received this letter were considering going back under the captivity of the Law, after having experienced the glorious freedom of the Spirit. We are tempted to fall into the captivity of legalism, the love of money, lust, pleasure, selfishness or any other sin. Every type of sin will eventually enslave us if we become lazy in hearing God’s Word. Any of us can become stiffnecked.

How imperative it is for us to watch our own souls to see that we stay sensitive to the Word, to the Spirit, and to exhortations from the family of God (Hebrews 3:13). The author is addressing a common struggle that believers face, which is familiarity resulting in dullness. When was the last time you wept over conviction of sin or for joy at what the Word was speaking to you? When was the last time the words of a song became alive and expressed your heart to God? When was the last time you realized the words in a sermon were God speaking to you, and it broke your heart? If you can’t recall, then it may be that you may have become dull of hearing. How much of the wonder of the Word, of spiritual growth, and effectiveness in service to God are we missing because we have become dull of hearing? Thank God for His mercy that invites us to repent and be renewed (1 John 1:9), to have our ears opened again, and our hearts made sensitive once more. We can run from the scalpel of God’s Word, but the longer we run the more painful the eventual surgery. We run because the old nature does not want to die (Romans 6:6). Every surgery the Word performs is for our eternal good. We should be running to the Lord and inviting His Word to be cutting out the remaining strongholds of our old nature.

*12 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,* Hebrews 5:12 “Should be teachers” was a Greek way of saying “grasped the subject” (1 Corinthians 14:20). If they had not become dull of hearing, they would be teaching others or at least understood the basics well enough to move forward. This does not mean that they would be teachers in the church, though that might apply to some. Everyone in Christ should mature to the point that they could teach others. Paul exhorted Timothy to teach faithful people what he had been taught (2 Timothy 2:2). God means for all of us to have teachers and to teach others. It happens naturally in life. When people know we read the Bible and attend church, they are going to ask us what the Bible says about issues. They watch the way we deal with things, because they expect us to act according to the Word which we claim is the highest authority.

These Hebrews were being told they needed to relearn the basics. If they were considering going back into Judaism to escape persecution, they had missed some of the essentials of what Christ did and taught. They were missing the meaning behind the writings of their forefathers. Had they forgotten that the Law was their guardian until Christ came to justify them by faith (Galatians 3:24)? The basic principles of the oracles of God are that we are justified by faith alone (Habakkuk 2:4), that no one can keep the Law (Psalm 14:1), and that we need a Savior (Psalm 49:7). How could they miss that? And if we have received such a gracious gift, how can we live in denial of it?

Milk is a metaphor for the basic teachings, while meat is a metaphor for the deeper meanings. They needed to get back to the milk and be nourished so that they could grow and mature (1 Peter 2:2). We can repeat all sorts of teachings we have heard without living those truths, or without examining them to see if they line up with Scripture. I have met spiritually immature people who are eager to teach some knowledge they have been taught while their life doesn’t conform to that teaching. They can quote meat, but they need milk. Milk is humbling! Milk is good throughout our spiritual lives. After all, the plain things are the main things. Milk has every nutrient we need. But after we are built up on the milk, we begin to need solid food to mature even more.

*13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.* Hebrews 5:13 While infants may think they know a lot, they have so much more to learn. They may think they can answer correctly or give instruction, but they have yet to learn the nuances of Scripture, of circumstances, and of human nature. It is amazing to me how many people quote verses completely out of context, sometimes implying that they mean the exact opposite of the context from which they are taken. Unskilled in the word of righteousness means both that they don’t understand our righteousness is only by faith in Jesus and that any righteous acts we perform are the work of His life in us.

*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.* Hebrews 5:14 The deeper things of Scripture and the mysteries of the Word are solid food. It’s not that the solid food is some deep secret that only the enlightened can comprehend. That is the way of cults, and you usually have to pay a high fee to get in on those supposed secrets. Those false secrets usually are something to do with selfish indulgence being spiritual (2 Peter 2:1-3). That is not what the author is writing about. In some sense it is the opposite.

This is a very instructive verse. How do we know when a deeper teaching is valid or a distortion of the Word? How do we know when someone is really inspired and sees some deep truth that we don’t or if they are being misled and leading others astray? We learn to distinguish the difference by exercising our powers of discernment on a constant basis. Is what I’m hearing just my mind or the Holy Spirit? Constantly practicing the power of discernment will teach us to distinguish between good and evil. It is to watch the fruit of that teaching or idea (Matthew 7:20). It is to be able to put it alongside the Scriptures and see how it lines up. Does it feed the ego or glorify God? Does it excuse the sinful nature? We test it and learn from it and our powers of discernment grow. Then, and only then, are we ready for meat.

Cult leaders have such success with those who have not yet learned discernment. They find spiritual babes who are excited about their faith and want to learn more. They tap into young believers’ untamed egos promising secret insights to the Word or some method that makes them spiritually superior to others. Because those followers have not yet learned to discern good from evil, they are ensnared and misled. The battle between the flesh and spirit is confused because they can’t discern which is which (Galatians 5:17). We need to continually exercise that power of discernment and learn to recognize what is of God and what is not. Then we are ready for meatier teaching and revelations in the Word.

*1 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,* Hebrews 6:1 The elementary doctrine of Christ has been laid out in the previous chapters. The Christ, aka Messiah, is Jesus. He is greater than the angels (Hebrews 1:5). He has the greatest of titles, The Son! He provided purification for sin and is set down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3). He is greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:3). He is the builder of the house of God. He is our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). Now that we have that straight, let us go on to maturity. There is no need to keep dwelling on the foundation of repentance from dead works. That is the milk that we should all know and understand. Just doing things to please God without the leading of the Spirit is never going to make you right with God. We repent of the very idea that somehow in our flesh we could please God. Keeping the Laws given to Moses isn’t good enough because we will never keep them all (James 2:10).

Nor did they need to lay again the foundation of faith toward God. They already understood that salvation was by faith. The author will dwell on this in chapter eleven, because they knew the foundation; they just didn’t yet see how it was so essential throughout Jewish history, and therefore, just as essential in the crisis they were facing.

The next verse gives us more foundational issues that we should have a solid understanding of so we can move on from milk to meat. *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.* Hebrews 6:2-3 The author gave a short list of essential foundational teachings of the early church. We already mentioned the first three, the doctrine of Christ, repentance from dead works, and faith toward God which are the essentials of salvation. Now the author gives the more minor basic teachings, the first being instruction about washings. This is one word in Greek, *baptismos*, meaning the ceremony of baptism. ESV study notes explain that because the word is plural it may refer to the difference between ceremonial washings of the Jews and Christian baptism. Jews would baptize themselves before entering the temple or at any time they felt the need to be cleansed. It was an outward sign of the desire of God’s inner cleansing. Once again we see there may have been an Essene connection here because the Essenes made ritual cleansing an important part of daily life. Acts 19:4, 5 tell of some men who received the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist and then were re-baptized into Christ by Paul.

We plan on some baptisms in the creek next Sunday. Christian baptisms are not expressing the desire to be cleansed, but rather a declaration that we have died with Christ and been raised with Him. It is a confession that we are one with our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

The next on the list was the laying on of hands. In the Book of Acts this often occurred along with baptism in water that the persons might also be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6). It was also done when appointing people to ministry (Acts 6:6; 13:3). Dying with Jesus and being raised with Him empowered by the Spirit is the only way to live a Christian life.

The next basic teaching was the resurrection from the dead. Since a faction of Jews did not believe in resurrection, it was important to share with new believers that our hope is not in this life alone (1 Corinthians 15:16-19). God raised up Jesus and will also raise us up by His power (1 Corinthians 6:14). The best is yet to come! Hallelujah! When we leave this life, our spirit goes to be with God. When Jesus returns, He will transform our bodies that lay in the dust into heavenly bodies that will meet our spirits in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). Eternity in His presence is more wonderful than we can imagine (Psalms 16:11).

The final basic teaching was about eternal judgment. There is a Judgment Day. What we have done with Christ will determine our eternal destiny. If we are in Christ, we are judged righteous and will be rewarded for our service during this earthly life. Those who have rejected the love of God in Jesus will face the wrath of God for their sins. I believe that they will be those who have hardened their hearts to the point that they would never turn to Jesus under any circumstances. Scripture indicates that they will be the majority of people (Matthew 7:13-14). Resurrection and judgment are the future to which all are destined.

Every one of these basics should have been a warning to these Hebrew believers to not evade persecution by returning to Judaism. Their belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, repentance from dead works of the Law, their faith in God, the declaration of their baptism, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the future resurrection and Day of Judgment, all of these tell them that would be forsaking the foundation of their faith to return to Judaism. These same foundations should affect all our decisions as well. Are our choices consistent with these foundational truths?

The author ends this thought with an encouraging note. He writes that they will move on from the foundation to deeper truths if God permits. It’s all by the grace of God. He will continue with His warning which I will preach on next week Lord willing. Today we are challenged to ask ourselves if we have become dull of hearing. Have we become teachers, or are we stunted in our Christian growth, still in need of milk? Are the basics we were taught foundational for our daily lives? Then we can go on to the meatier things of God in the rest of this letter. And so we will, if God permits.

Questions

1 Why was it hard to explain deeper things?

2 When was the last time you wept over conviction of sin or for joy at what the Word was speaking to you?

3 Why do we run from the voice of God?

4 Why did they need milk?

5 How do we know when a deeper teaching is valid or a distortion of the Word?

6 How do we learn to discern good from evil?

7 What has the author taught about Jesus?

8 What is repentance from dead works?

9 What are the other essential doctrines?

10 Do they affect how you live your life and make decisions?