

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

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,
³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Commented [PW4]: Hebrews 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Commented [PW5]: Hebrews 3:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?
¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Commented [PW6]: 2 Chronicles 30:8 (ESV)

⁸ Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you.

Commented [PW7]: Jeremiah 11:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers.

Commented [PW8]: Hebrews 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Commented [PW9]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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

Commented [PW10]: Romans 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Commented [PW11]: 1 Corinthians 14:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

Commented [PW12]: 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Commented [PW13]: Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Commented [PW14]: Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Commented [PW15]: Psalm 14:1 (ESV)

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

Commented [PW16]: Psalm 49:7 (ESV)

⁷ Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life,

Commented [PW17]: 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

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

Commented [PW18]: 2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.
³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Commented [PW19]: Matthew 7:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Commented [PW20]: Galatians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Commented [PW21]: Hebrews 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

Commented [PW22]: Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Commented [PW23]: Hebrews 3:3 (ESV)

³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

Commented [PW24]: Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

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

Commented [PW25]: James 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

Commented [PW26]: Acts 19:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Commented [PW27]: Acts 8:14-17 (ESV)

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,

¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,

¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Commented [PW28]: Acts 19:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Commented [PW29]: Acts 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Commented [PW30]: Acts 13:3 (ESV)

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Commented [PW31]: 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Commented [PW32]: 1 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

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?

Commented [PW33]: 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Commented [PW34]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Commented [PW35]: Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.