

Pressing on to Maturity

Hebrews 5:11-14

Part One

Little children want to grow up. This is natural. They want to go from being fed to feeding themselves. They want to go from being dressed, to dressing themselves. They want to grow up and this is a wonderful thing for it is the natural thing and if this natural thing does not happen it would not serve them nor would it serve others. In fact, it would be rather tragic. And this brings us back to our study.

We are presently studying the Book of Hebrews. This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism.

The author in response to this struggle wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

And what was at stake? Their souls, for if they did not persevere it would demonstrate that they never truly possessed genuine, living, saving faith, that kind of faith, that is given by God and is protected by God. So obviously there was a lot at stake in the mind of this author as he penned this letter.

So how did author within this letter go about strengthening the faith of his readers? He focused on Christ's superiority in matters related to Judaism.

So, what have we seen so far? We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets in **Hebrews 1:1-4**. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels in **Hebrews 1:5-2:18**. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**. And now we are seeing, in our ongoing examination of this epistle that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods (**Hebrews 4:14-10:18**). This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**. So how did the author begin this particular lengthy section?

The author of Hebrews in **Hebrews 4:14-16** focused his readers on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry. These verses served as an overlapping

transition that tied what he had said earlier in the epistle about Christ's high priestly ministry, which was very limited to what he was about to say in a far more expansive way, which really does need to be divided up and it can be divided up and we will be dividing it up into two parts. So, what is the first part?

After having focused his reader's attention on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry, the author then addressed Christ's appointment as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28). So how did the author begin?

The author in Hebrews 5:1-10 began with a simple introduction. In this introduction the author made it very clear to his readers that Christ, their great high priest, had not been divinely appointed their great high priest according to the old order of priesthood that had been established under the Law, but rather according to an entirely new order of priesthood, which the author referred to as the order of Melchizedek. This order of priesthood did not flow out from the Old Covenant, which was rooted in animal sacrifices but rather it flowed out from the New Covenant, which was rooted in Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The author then concluded this brief introduction by outlining Christ's path to that appointment, which was the path of suffering, obedience and perseverance. This is where we left off in our study. So, what will happen next?

The author, after having introduced the Son's divine appointment according to the order of Melchizedek, then took a strategic detour in order to warn his readers in Hebrews 5:11-6:20. And this is where we will be for the next several months.

So how did the author begin this warning section? The author began this warning section with an exhortation (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). This exhortation section begins in **Hebrews 5:11** and will conclude in **Hebrews 6:3**. So now let me read these verses for you. **“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone**

who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (1) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do, if God permits.” So based on these verses, did the author of this epistle begin this warning section, that will extend all the way down to Hebrews 6:20, with an exhortation? Yes! Absolutely!

And what was this exhortation? It was “...let us press on to maturity...” This exhortation can be found in **Hebrews 6:1**.

So why did this author believe this exhortation was so necessary for this group of struggling Hebrew Christians? When an individual exercises true genuine saving faith in Christ and thus becomes a new creature in Christ according to **2 Corinthians 5:17**, we would expect him over time to become more like Christ or in other words more mature. Just as we would expect a small child over time to become more mature.

We certainly would not expect a new believer to remain as they were when they first came to Christ or to slip back to where they were after having initially started well.

Unfortunately, it would appear that some or perhaps even many of the recipients of this letter had not gotten the memo. And it was for this reason that this author felt it was necessary to exhort his readers in **Hebrews 6:1** “**to press on to maturity**” for obviously they were not.

So, what did this author do in order to prepare the way for his exhortation in **Hebrews 6:1**? The author in preparing the way for his exhortation in **Hebrews 6:1** began with a negative assessment of his reader’s spiritual maturity.

So how did this author begin his negative assessment of his reader’s spiritual maturity? First of all, the author began his negative assessment of his reader’s spiritual maturity by stating their problem in **Hebrews 5:11-12**. Let

me now read for you these verses and see if this is not so. **“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though; by this time you ought to be teachers you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”** So did the author begin his negative assessment of his reader’s spiritual maturity by stating their problem? Yes! This is exactly what he did. So now let us look at these verses more carefully beginning with **Verse 11**.

And how did this verse begin. It began this way, **“Concerning him we have much to say”** or better translated, as it is in the ESV translation, **“Concerning this we have much to say.”**

So, what was the author referring to when he referred to “this”? Based on the previous verse or in other words **verse 10**, the author, in his pursuit of establishing the superiority of Christ’s high priesthood over all other priesthoods, introduced the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ. And it was “this” or in other words the “Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ” that this author wanted to speak more about to his readers, and this is why he went on to say in **verse 11**, **“Concerning this we have much to say.”**

But he didn’t immediately do this. Why? He wanted to first of all explain to his readers why doing such a thing would be so very difficult. And what was his explanation for why it would be so very difficult?

Was it because what he wanted to say was so complicated it would be difficult for him to adequately explain or for them to adequately understand? No! That was not the problem. The problem resided in them, not in the subject matter.

And how do we know this? Let us continue to read **verse 11**. **“Concerning this [the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain [not because of the difficulty of the subject matter but rather it is hard to explain], since you have become dull of hearing.”**

So, what was the author in essence trying to communicate to his readers when he told them that they had become “dull of hearing”?

The world “dull” (NOTHROI) can also be translated “sluggish, negligent or lazy.” So based on this understanding, what was the author trying to communicate to his readers when he told them that they had had become “dull of hearing?”

This is what he would have been communicating. Though they may have started out well, eager to learn and expending energy to learn, they had become spiritually lazy or in other words they had begun to listen with the attentiveness of a slug. Or we could say it this way: they had become unreceptive and closed.

And this is certainly not something that today’s professing church is necessarily immune from. In fact, I would believe it is quite common in the professing church today. And because it is quite common in the church today it would very easily explain why there are so many professing believers who know so very little about their faith and who are doing so very little in regards to their faith. They just did not want to be bothered.

So after this indictment of his readers, what did the author do next? The author, after having indicted his readers in **Hebrews 5:11** as “dull of hearing,” then went on to deepen that indictment by telling them that though they should now be teachers, they instead needed to be taught again (**Hebrews 5:12**).

So let me begin to read for you the beginning of **verse 12** and see if this is not so. **“For though; by this time you ought to be teachers you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”** So did the author deepen his indictment of his readers by telling them that though they ought to be teachers by now that they again needed to be taught? Yes! He did.

So, what was the problem? These professing Hebrew Christians, because of their “dullness of hearing,” were not functioning in the way they should have been functioning in light of the amount of time they had been Christians. And how should they have been functioning, in light of the amount of time they had been Christians? They should have been functioning as “teachers.”

So based on these words, let me ask you a question. How long does it take a person once they have become a Christian to become a teacher? It only takes

a long as it takes for someone to learn something, for as soon as a Christian learns something, they can teach what they have learned. Isn't this true? Yes, absolutely! If we have learned something we can teach it.

So let me ask you this question. Had these Hebrew Christians, at some point, in their past, learned something about the Christian faith? Yes! Absolutely! Otherwise they never would have been able to make a profession of faith in Christ.

But what they had learned was slipping away from them! How do we know this? Let us continue to read the verse, **“For though; by this time you ought to be teachers you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”** So why would they once again have a need for someone to teach them the elementary principles of the oracles of God or in other words the elementary teachings concerning Christ based on **Hebrews 6:1**? Because they had become dull of hearing and therefore the elementary principles of the oracles of God or in other words the elementary teachings concerning Christ that they had once understood were slipping away.

At first these Hebrew believers had listened attentively to the basic truths concerning Christ and they had actually learned these truths, as least as well as someone might initially learn certain basic truths. And it was real learning. However, just because we have learned something does not mean that we will be able to keep it at the forefront of our minds. Does it! Isn't this obvious.

Have you ever heard the expression use it or lose it? This very much applies to what we have here. These Hebrew readers, rather than having gone forward in their understanding and appreciation of Christ through energetic hearing, had actually, because of the dullness of their hearing, gone backwards, which obviously made them vulnerable for returning back to Judaism. So after having stated the problem for his readers, what did he do next?

After the author stated the problem for his readers he then graphically illustrated the problem for his readers (**Hebrews 5:12-13**).

So how did this author after stating the problem graphically illustrate it? Let me read for you the end of **verse 12**. **“And you have come to need milk and not solid food.”** So how did the author graphically illustrate the problem?

He illustrated their problem by talking to them about how they had regressed from being able to ingest solid food to now only being able to ingest milk, or in other words he talked to them about how they had gone from eating solid food back to sucking on a bottle.

The truth is that there is simply no such thing as a static Christian. We either move forward or fall back. We are either climbing or falling. We are either winning or losing. Static, status quo Christianity is a delusion! And certainly this picture this author painted for his readers here at the end of **verse 12** certainly should have communicated that to these readers.

And his readers should in no way delude themselves by thinking that they could continue the path they were going or in other words continue to drink their milk and somehow grow to maturity. It just was not going to happen.

Let me read for you **Hebrews 5:13**, **“For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.”**

Now this is very interesting. Why will a professing believer who continues to drink milk forever remain an infant and be forever vulnerable to horrible things such as falling away from the faith? It is because milk drinkers are **“not accustomed to the word of righteousness,”** which is the meat.

So now let me ask you this question. What is the word of righteousness? I do not believe the word of righteousness is referring to the word of justification, for these readers are being appealed to as if they are in fact Christians.

Now the fact is they may not be Christians but there is no doubt that this whole epistle is appealing to them as if they are Christians. Therefore, I believe it is best to understand this phrase more in ethical sense.

The “word of righteousness” would refer to God’s revelation about what constitutes righteousness as it relates to life.

The Christian faith is not an abstraction; it is never divorced from life. The content of doctrine to which the believer assents must issue in a transformed life or something is radically wrong. Scriptures give no comfort whatever to the person whose claim to have trusted Christ that is not resulting in a life of righteousness.

So after the author stated and illustrated the problem, then what did he do? After the author stated and illustrated the problem for his readers, he then provided them the cure (Hebrews 5:14).

Let me read for you **Hebrews 5:14**. **“But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”** So, what is the cure?

The cure for the readers who had become dull of hearing and had regressed back to the bottle was for them to start eating solid food so that they in becoming more acquainted with the word of righteousness and in their practice of it might grow in their ability to discern between right and wrong.

If these readers were going to be able to pull themselves out of their downward spiral away from Christ and back toward Judaism, this is what they would have to do, and that would begin with them becoming more energetic in their hearing accompanied with an intent to embrace and practice what they heard.

When we listen to God’s word, may our ears not be lazy of hearing but rather may they be eager of hearing so that we in being accustomed to the word of righteousness might grow to full maturity.