

“Dealing With The Dulling Deceivers”

Hebrews 5:11-14

September 30, 2018

INTRO: Welcome to THE BRIDGE & “Hold On”

- We’re continuing to walk thru Hebrews...
 - A letter of exhortation to Jews leaving Jesus
 - A letter of warnings about worship...
 - A letter of faith and faithfulness...
- Hebrews **Informs**, **Inspects** & **Inspires** the church
- Hebrews calls all *true* Christians to **BE** the Church

T/S: Last week we did an overview of ch. 5:11 – 6:20

- We noted it was the 3rd of Hebrews’ **5 warnings...**
 - **#1 Don’t DRIFT** from Christ (becoming discontent)
 - **#2 Don’t DISCONNECT** from Christ/Church
 - **#3 Don’t DILLY-DALLY** (w/ God’s Word, Will or Way)
 - **#4 Don’t DISOBEY** Christ & His call on His Church
 - **#5 Don’t DENY & DEFY** Christ & His Church’s call
- In the passage last wk. we saw **3 major divisions:**
 - Everyone in church was told to **Listen Up!**
 - And the true church was told we’ll **Show Up!**
 - **Group 1: The Childish** were told to **Grow Up!**
 - **Group 2: Counterfeits** were told to **Wake Up!**
 - **Group 3: Cherished** were told to **Stand Up!**

When your point is not sustained by principle, your perspective is off & your position is wrong. – JDP

T/S: Remember Hebrews 4:12ff

Believers have a moral responsibility to know and understand Scripture. We often act as if our biblical ignorance is merely a matter of God hiding or withholding knowledge from us. Yet Scripture teaches us that our ignorance of God's Word is a moral problem, not an intellectual one. When we deliberately ignore God's Word for whatever reason, we sin against the Lord. - Mohler

BIG IDEA:

*Nothing dulls disciples more than deceitfully divisive & distracting detractors
(a.k.a. "false teachers")*

T/S: Today family, I am going to shepherd you like sheep...

- I'm going to do my best to equip you with and through God's Word.
- I'm going to apply this passage in the same way the author of Hebrews' wrote & intended it.
- **I pray you will walk away blessed & built up.**

*I pray that you will walk away today with a new found & **never forgotten** divine-defense against any & all dulling-deceivers!*

PREVIEW:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>Clarifying</i> | Dullness |
| 2. <i>Categories</i> | of <u>False Teachers</u> |
| 3. <i>Characteristics</i> | of <u>False Teachers</u> |
| 4. <i>Cultures & Contrast</i> | of <u>False Teachers</u> |
| 5. <i>Combatting</i> | the <u>False Teachers</u> |

I. Clarifying Dullness

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

When a person is spiritually dull, he is difficult to teach.

- MacArthur

A. Internal

- *“IF you love Me you will obey My commandments”*
- *“Love the Lord your God with ALL your...”*

Christ’s priesthood became difficult to understand because their hearts became indifferent to Scripture.

- Mohler

B. External

- Jude; 1 John; Titus; 2 Peter; Romans; etc...
- Later in Hebrews...
- *“Beware the wolves in sheep’s clothing”* - Jesus

II. Categories of False Teachers

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.

A. Internal: Be careful who you're listening to...

This reference to "teachers" is not a reference to those who hold a particular teaching office such as a pastor or elder. Rather, by using the term teacher, the author is addressing their responsibility to disciple other believers. - Mohler

B. External

- Learn from what you haven't learned...
- To become a teacher... learn from trusted teachers!

VIDEO 1: *Categories of False Teachers*

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| A. Beware the HERITICS | (Fatally flawed) |
| B. Beware the CHARLATANS | (Hirelings) |
| C. Beware the FALSE PROPHETS | (Bible +/-) |
| D. Beware the ABUSERS | (Vile & Evil) |
| E. Beware the DIVIDERS | (Koinonia-cancer) |
| F. Beware the SPECULATORS | (Devils advocates) |
| G. Beware the TICKLERS | (Devil's curriers) |

Go to ["Come and See Christianity"](#) *Fundamentals* on YouTube
Foundations; Framework; Facts; Fight; Faith; Family; Forever!

III. Characteristics of False Teachers

You need milk, not meat/solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

A small child will stick almost anything into his mouth, touch anything he can reach, go anywhere he can manage to crawl—with no concept of what is good for him and what is bad, what is helpful and what is dangerous. The mature adult, on the other hand, has developed considerable discernment. He is careful about what he eats, what he does, where he goes.

– MacArthur

A. Internal:

- Be careful who you're listening to...
- Don't assume ALL "milk" is good milk!

B. External

- Learn how to discern false teaching
- Learn how to discern false teachers

VIDEO 2: *Characteristics of False Teachers*

- Man-Pleasers
- Attack Truth-Tellers
- Teachers of personal opinions vs. timeless truth
- Majors on the minors & minors on the majors
- Delivers cancer in candy
- Builds own's crowd vs. the Almighty's Church
- Exploits followers (flesh, fears, & forgetfulness)

IV. Cultures/Contrast of False Teachers

¹⁴ But solid food/meat is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained...

A. Internal:

- Be careful who you're listening to...
- Learn to love & live God's Word...

Hebrews teaches Christians two important lessons about our responsibility to mature in the faith.... 1). It is an individual believer's responsibility to grow.... 2). It is the church's responsibility to teach the individual believer. - Mohler

B. External

- Stay away from any & all Bible-diminishers
- Don't trust ANY unbiblical training/teachers

VIDEO 3: Cultures & Contrast of False Teachers

- Become a part of the "New Reformation"

Sadly, many congregations drink nothing but milk because that is all their pastors are feeding them. In other cases, congregations stubbornly refuse the solid food their pastors are offering them. Christians cannot accomplish what the author of Hebrews envisions if both of these barriers are not overcome. Healthy Christians serving in healthy congregations are essential to spiritual maturity.

V. *Combatting False Teachers*

¹⁴ But solid food/meat is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained...

by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

A. **Internal:**

- Be careful who you're listening to...
- Commit to **CONSTANT** practice in the Word!
- Decide **how bad you want to** distinguish...
- BE a teacher that combats the false teachers!

B. **External**

- BE an ambassador vs. a push-over!
- Confront the lies & liars!
- Consider what's at stake!
 - Imagine your loved ones
 - Imagine other's loved ones
 - Imagine God's glory, grace, & gospel!

VIDEO 4: *Combatting of False Teachers*

- Take heart Christian... **Hebrews is a love letter!**
- **God's warnings are here to bring:**
 - Help
 - Hope
 - Healing to your soul!

Family... nothing sharpens a dull disciple faster than worshipping, walking, working, & witnessing Christ Jesus our King – per the Word & Spirit of God!

CLOSE:

This warning is ultimately about the entirety of the Christian's spiritual life.... The more we know, the more we should want to learn.

I want to close with the Word of God...

He says it BEST!

Titus 2:11-15

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Amen & AMEN

Let's PRAY!

STUDY Notes:

Hebrews 5:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ About this/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 need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not meat/solid food,

¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

¹⁴ But solid food/meat is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

those who shut their ears to God's Word regress in their faith and fumble in their comprehension.... Believers have a moral responsibility to know and understand Scripture. We often act as if our biblical ignorance is merely a matter of God hiding or withholding knowledge from us. Yet Scripture teaches us that our ignorance of God's Word is a moral problem, not an intellectual one. When we deliberately ignore God's Word for whatever reason, we sin against the Lord.

In the case of the Hebrews, the congregation became intellectually sluggish by their own negligence. Their spiritual immaturity was their fault. They grew intellectually dull because they became sluggish of heart. Christ's priesthood became difficult to understand because their hearts became indifferent to Scripture. Thus, the author must stop explaining Christ's priesthood in order to admonish his people and prod them out of their lethargy.

A Failure to Know and Grow:

This reference to “teachers” is not a reference to those who hold a particular teaching office such as a pastor or elder. Rather, by using the term *teacher*, the author is addressing their responsibility to disciple other believers. Not all Christians are expected to be pastors or elders. All Christians, however, are expected to be teachers in the sense that they should be prepared to train new believers in the fundamentals of the faith. The congregation should consist of willing and maturing disciples who are training up newer and less developed disciples.

we must not limit this particular warning only to the Christian's intellect. This warning is ultimately about the entirety of the Christian's spiritual life. Our spiritual life should be such that we are learning to take responsibility for our own growth.

The more we know, the more we should want to learn.

We are called to do this not only for ourselves but so that we can teach those who are less spiritually mature. Our spiritual growth has both inward and outward dimensions.

Getting Back to the Basics:

This text also teaches another important truth about the Christian life. Certain fundamental principles and doctrinal foundations are prerequisites for understanding more mature and complex truths.

Before we can handle the upper-level courses, we must master the entry-level classes.

Milk and Moral Immaturity:

What ought to be taking place in the spiritual lives of the congregation is not taking place. They ought to be feasting on the solid foods of the faith, not continuing to nurse on the milk of spiritual infancy. This is why the author rebukes them

All Christians, even maturing ones, always need the Bible. Discernment simply means that we find ourselves in familiar territory when we open the Word of God. Discernment means the Bible doesn't disorient us. We know how to read, study, understand, and reason from the Scriptures. When Christians possess discernment and can distinguish between good and evil, they have the capacity for spiritual reasoning. They can see how one doctrine relates to another and can logically apply those doctrines to aid decision making in all areas of the Christian life.

the author teaches Christians two important lessons about our responsibility to mature in the faith: (1) **It is an individual believer's responsibility to grow in spiritual understanding so that the congregation as a whole is better equipped to faithfully minister the gospel to those in need.** (2) **It is the church's responsibility to teach the individual believer.**

Sadly, many congregations drink nothing but milk because that is all their pastors are feeding them. In other cases, congregations stubbornly refuse the solid food their pastors are offering them. Christians cannot accomplish what the author of Hebrews envisions if both of these barriers are not overcome. Healthy Christians serving in healthy congregations are essential to spiritual maturity.

The process of spiritual maturity is a long and challenging one. But the goal is to gradually move from a diet of milk to a diet of solid food. We may retain childish tendencies for a time, but we must be steadily growing out of them... **We can never stop feasting on the solid food of God's Word.**

- Mohler

The central theme and message of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, that is, of Christianity to Judaism.

Within this theme are the subthemes of the superiority of the new priesthood to the old, the new sacrifice to the old ones, the new Mediator to the old ones, and so on. This is the key that unlocks every section of Hebrews, and to use any other key is, I believe, to make forced entry.

In the book of Hebrews the Holy Spirit is not contrasting two kinds of Christianity. He is not contrasting immature Christians and mature ones. He is contrasting Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. He is contrasting the substance and the shadow, the pattern and the reality

Dullness Prevents Understanding

So before they could possibly understand the significance of Jesus' priesthood being like Melchizedek's, the readers needed to get beyond their limited, immature understanding of God. A key mark of that immaturity was simply dullness of hearing, spiritual lethargy.

When a person is spiritually dull, he is difficult to teach. These Jews had been lulled into sleep because of neglect and hardness of heart, and they would have to awaken and become alert if they were to appreciate the truth, significance, and necessity of the New Covenant.

It is easy for people to hear the gospel, and then hear it and hear it and hear it until it becomes commonplace and meaningless to them.

A small child will stick almost anything into his mouth, touch anything he can reach, go anywhere he can manage to crawl—with no concept of what is good for him and what is bad, what is helpful and what is dangerous. The mature adult, on the other hand, has developed considerable discernment. He is careful about what he eats, what he does, where he goes.

The same principle operates in the spiritual realm. The **mature** believer has discernment about what is right and wrong, true and false, helpful and harmful, righteous and unrighteous.

- MacArthur

Dullness toward the Word (v. 11). These... started on their "backward journey" *by drifting from the Word (Heb. 2:1-4)*, and then *doubting the Word (Heb. 3:7-4:13)*. As a result, they were now "dull of hearing"; that is, unable to listen to the Word, receive it, and act on it.

They did not have the attitude of the Thessalonians: *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe"*

(1 Thes. 2:13)

A baby will put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures.

As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner "spiritual senses" get their exercise and become strong and keen. Paul called this process exercising ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

The ability to discern good and evil is a vital part of Christian maturity. The nation of Israel in Moses' day lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance.

- Bible Exposition
Commentary
- Wiersbe

Our words should be chosen wisely and spoken as if we are speaking the very words (oracles) of God. When we quote Scripture and expound on its meaning, we actually are speaking the oracles of God.

Warning against Stagnation

Hebrews 5:11-14

Main Idea: We must steadily pursue maturity in the faith by digesting the deep truths of God's Word.

- I. **The Diagnosis: Dull Hearing ([5:11](#))**
- II. **The Symptom: Childish Understanding ([5:12-13](#))**
 - A. A failure to know and grow
 - B. Getting back to the basics
 - C. Milk and moral immaturity
 - D. The word of righteousness
- III. **The Remedy: Discerning Power ([5:14](#))**
- IV. **Our Responsibility**

Certain moments are crystallized in our memories. I vividly recall an event that occurred when I was just ten years old. I was complaining to my father about an ailment I was experiencing. When he asked me what was wrong, I replied, “I have a tummy ache.”

My father responded in a way I’ll never forget. “You’re ten years old,” he said. “You don’t have a tummy anymore, you have a stomach.” There was a little bite to my father’s words, but it was necessary. In my father’s eyes, the word *tummy* did not demonstrate my maturation into adolescence. I do not think he expected me to remember this story forty years later, but he certainly expected me to grow up a little by developing my vocabulary and learning to act my age.

Similarly, **the author of Hebrews rebukes and exhorts his readers in a way that only a loving, spiritual father could. He admonishes them for their willful ignorance and immaturity in the faith. They still need milk when they should be eating solid food. The author urges them to leave behind their spiritual childishness and to move into spiritual adulthood by developing an appetite for the solid food of God’s Word.**

Like my father did with me over forty years ago, the author is telling his people, “It’s time to grow up.”

The Diagnosis: Dull Hearing Hebrews 5:11

The phrase “*about this*” refers to the author’s previous discussion about the differences between Christ’s priesthood and Aaron’s priesthood (4:14–5:10). In that discussion, the author teaches us that the great high priesthood of Christ is infinitely superior to that of the priests of the old covenant since Christ is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The writer returns to the topic of Jesus’s priesthood later in the letter, but he interrupts the discussion here in order to exhort and chastise his people for their spiritual dullness and immaturity in the faith.

The author wants to continue talking about Christ’s priesthood, but he stops. Why? Is it because Christ’s priesthood is inherently difficult to understand? The author says the priesthood of Christ is “difficult to explain,” but is it because Christ’s priesthood itself is too perplexing? No. It is difficult to explain because the people have become “too lazy to understand.” They don’t have the mature ears, minds, or hearts for grasping the concept. Those who are trained in Scripture and are progressing in the faith are better equipped to understand Christ’s priesthood, but those who shut their ears to God’s Word regress in their faith and fumble in their comprehension. Spiritual concepts like Christ’s priesthood are difficult only for the spiritually immature, those who have become “too lazy.” The spiritually mature, on the other hand,

have the energy to investigate and understand spiritual concepts that are hard to explain.

Believers have a moral responsibility to know and understand Scripture. We often act as if our biblical ignorance is merely a matter of God hiding or withholding knowledge from us. Yet Scripture teaches us that our ignorance of God's Word is a moral problem, not an intellectual one. When we deliberately ignore God's Word for whatever reason, we sin against the Lord. In the case of the Hebrews, the congregation became intellectually sluggish by their own negligence. Their spiritual immaturity was their fault. They grew intellectually dull because they became sluggish of heart. Christ's priesthood became difficult to understand because their hearts became indifferent to Scripture. Thus, the author must stop explaining Christ's priesthood in order to admonish his people and prod them out of their lethargy.

The Symptom: Childish Understanding
Hebrews 5:12-13

In verse 12 the author more acutely pinpoints the root cause of this congregation's spiritual immaturity. **Not only can they not understand spiritual concepts like Christ's priesthood, but they have also forgotten the fundamental things of the faith!** Even though they have had plenty of time to become teachers themselves, they actually need teachers to reteach them the elementary doctrines of the Christian faith.

A Failure to Know and Grow:

This reference to “teachers” is not a reference to those who hold a particular teaching office such as a pastor or elder. Rather, by using the term *teacher*, the author is addressing their responsibility to disciple other believers. Not all Christians are expected to be pastors or elders. All Christians, however, are expected to be teachers in the sense that they should be prepared to train new believers in the fundamentals of the faith. The congregation should consist of willing and maturing disciples who are training up newer and less developed disciples. They ought to be teaching others. Instead, they are lapsing spiritually and need others to teach them the basics of the faith again.

The word *again* is critical here because it indicates that the congregation did not internalize the teaching they already received. They do not need to be taught for the first time. They have already been taught “the basic principles of God’s revelation.” The word *again* implies that the congregation has forgotten what they should know by heart by now. This is not a simple case of their needing review. Christians, no matter their maturity in the faith, should always review the elementary things of the faith. This congregation, however, needs more than recap: they need to relearn. **Thus, we must be careful to internalize the teaching we receive and to take the fundamentals of the faith to heart so that we are established in the faith and able to fulfill our responsibility as “teachers,” that is, as disciples.**

The issue the author addresses here is the Christian’s intellectual responsibility. But we must not limit this particular warning

only to the Christian's intellect. This warning is ultimately about the entirety of the Christian's spiritual life. Our spiritual life should be such that we are learning to take responsibility for our own growth. We must be developing an appetite for grace, knowledge, and understanding. The more we know, the more we should want to learn. We are called to do this not only for ourselves but so that we can teach those who are less spiritually mature. Our spiritual growth has both inward and outward dimensions. We grow in the faith for our own sake and for the sake of others.

Getting Back to the Basics:

This text also teaches another important truth about the Christian life. Certain fundamental principles and doctrinal foundations are prerequisites for understanding more mature and complex truths. Before we can handle the upper-level courses, we must master the entry-level classes. We must grasp basic truths at basic levels before we can move forward. What are these basic principles? The author lays them out at the beginning of [chapter 6](#), so we will look at them more in depth in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that the basic principles are the truths that make up the basic storyline of Scripture.

Labeling these principles as “God’s revelation” communicates that Scripture is God’s spoken word. This also points to God’s self-disclosing and decisive acts in redemptive history. These acts, which the author lays out in fuller detail later on in the letter, are seminal moments in the history of Israel and the church. In these acts God reveals truths about himself that inform our understanding of who he is and establish the

fundamental doctrines of our faith. The author's readers are indicted for their failure to put this revelation into practice. As a result of their spiritual lethargy, they remain infants in the faith. Their digestive systems can only handle spiritual milk, not solid food.

Milk and Moral Immaturity:

The writer of Hebrews speaks pastorally in these verses. We might even say he speaks paternally. What ought to be taking place in the spiritual lives of the congregation is not taking place. They ought to be feasting on the solid foods of the faith, not continuing to nurse on the milk of spiritual infancy. This is why the author rebukes them as he does. He rebukes them the way my father rebuked me when I told him my tummy hurt.

There is *nothing* wrong with giving milk to an infant. It is natural for an infant to live on a diet of milk. In fact, despite all of our scientific and technological advancement, we have never been able to develop something that can nourish an infant quite like a mother's milk. **It would be pointless to put a steak dinner in front of a baby. The child is simply not ready for it.** But everything is wrong with offering mother's milk when the child is ready for steak. That is why the word picture in this text is so powerful. This congregation ought to be eating spiritual steak by now. Instead, they're still living on milk.

Paul uses the metaphor of milk in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2. He writes,

For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready.

A remarkable symmetry between Paul's statement and Hebrews 5:13 exists. Just as Paul contrasts the spirit and the flesh, the author of Hebrews contrasts those who are skilled and unskilled in the message about righteousness. When we place these two texts beside each other, we learn that spiritual immaturity leads to moral immaturity. Spiritual immaturity leads to believers who live according to the flesh rather than the spirit. To willingly remain an infant in Christ makes one a person of the flesh and unfit for righteousness.

The Word of Righteousness:

“The message about righteousness” essentially means “the message that leads to salvation.” While there is a moral element to this message about righteousness, the context points us toward the gospel and God's saving purpose.

Believers who are childish are unskilled in the gospel because they lack the ability to turn to Scripture and see how God's plan to save culminates in the priestly work of Christ. They lack the maturity to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Christians are not to be ignorant about the gospel. Nor are we to be untutored in the Scriptures. We are called to be skilled in the message about righteousness and to walk in the ways we have been taught.

If the writer to the Hebrews were merely making a diagnosis, then those who are spiritually immature would

have little hope of remedying their situation. But the writer states that it is the believer's responsibility to become spiritually mature.

He urges his readers to leave behind the milk of spiritual infancy and to draw near to God by feasting on the solid food of spiritual maturity. This moral imperative serves as good news because it implies that spiritual maturity is quite possible in the life of a believer.

We cannot persist on a diet of milk when God offers us solid food.

The Remedy: Discerning Power

Hebrews 5:14

We now arrive at the contrast between mature and immature believers. As we saw in [1 Corinthians 3](#), Paul refers to the meat of the faith as solid food—food that requires the hard work of chewing and digesting. Only by faithfully and diligently studying the Scriptures can we rightly train and exercise our spiritual power of discernment. Thus, only the mature can distinguish good from evil. The immature are too weak and have not had enough practice.

Discernment is critical to our lives. It often takes shape in ways that are not overtly intellectual. Think about it. We negotiate many of our day-to-day decisions on the basis of an intuitive discernment. To put it another way, **discernment is like a theological grid or a worldview that helps us make**

instant moral and theological judgments about our circumstances. We would never get anything done if we made every decision on the basis of sheer intellectual reconstruction. Imagine a heart surgeon who has to stop and rethink cardiology in the middle of a surgery. Imagine how disastrous it would be if he needed to consult a textbook every time he entered the operating room. No one wants that kind of surgeon. We want surgeons who can use the intuition they have developed over years of dedicated practice. This need for discernment applies not only to surgeons but also to Christians.

Discernment is a higher order of thinking and can only be acquired through diligent training and experience. We want surgeons whose powers of discernment have been trained by constant practice. Similarly, *if we want to mature as Christians, we must train our powers of discernment by constant practice. We should so thoroughly consider and internalize the fundamentals of the faith that we are able to teach them to others and discern good from evil.* The author of Hebrews says that when we learn to practice discernment, we are ready for “solid food”—the weightier matters of God’s Word.

This does not mean Christians eventually reach the point where they no longer need to study Scripture. All Christians, even maturing ones, always need the Bible. Discernment simply means that we find ourselves in familiar territory when we open the Word of God. Discernment means the Bible doesn’t disorient us. We know how to read, study, understand, and reason from the Scriptures. When Christians possess discernment and can distinguish between good and evil, they have the capacity for spiritual reasoning. They can see how

one doctrine relates to another and can logically apply those doctrines to aid decision making in all areas of the Christian life.

Our Responsibility:

As we have seen, this passage indicts any Christians who are spiritually regressing when they should be growing. There is great and eternal peril in spiritual infancy, for it puts one in danger of falling away from God. Therefore, **the author teaches Christians two important lessons about our responsibility to mature in the faith: (1) It is an individual believer's responsibility to grow in spiritual understanding so that the congregation as a whole is better equipped to faithfully minister the gospel to those in need. (2) It is the church's responsibility to teach the individual believer.** Sadly, many congregations drink nothing but milk because that is all their pastors are feeding them. In other cases, congregations stubbornly refuse the solid food their pastors are offering them. Christians cannot accomplish what the author of Hebrews envisions if both of these barriers are not overcome. Healthy Christians serving in healthy congregations are essential to spiritual maturity.

The process of spiritual maturity is a long and challenging one. But the goal is to gradually move from a diet of milk to a diet of solid food. We may retain childish tendencies for a time, but we must be steadily growing out of them. We must learn to be mature in the faith as those who possess powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good

from evil. If this is to happen, we can never stop feasting on the solid food of God's Word.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Evaluate your own life. Can you think of any areas in which you are spiritually immature and are thus still an infant in the faith? Name them. Are you currently growing in spiritual maturity? If so, in what ways?
2. What excuses do you often hear regarding one's ignorance of biblical knowledge or spiritual understanding? What excuses do you find yourself using? How does this passage address the excuses we usually give for our failure to grow in biblical literacy and spiritual maturity?
3. The author rebukes this congregation for needing teachers when they should be teaching others. Does this rebuke help you think differently about your responsibility to teach other Christians? If so, how? How is an individual Christian's responsibility to teach others different from an elder's or pastor's responsibility to teach the church?
4. What are the fundamentals of the Christian faith? Why do you think Christians are so prone to forget the spiritual truths they have been taught? What are some ways we can fight this forgetfulness?
5. What is the purpose of discipleship? What should the process of discipleship look like? Are you currently discipling a younger believer? Why or why not? Think of a less mature believer in your life you could disciple.

6. What is the difference between childishness and childlikeness? What does it look like to be both childlike and mature at the same time?
7. In your own words, explain what it means to be unskilled in the message about righteousness. How is this related to our spiritual maturity?
8. In what ways do you practice spiritual intuition on a daily basis? How can you sharpen this intuition? How does the local church help us develop a spiritual intuition?
9. When you open Scripture, do you feel like you are in familiar or unfamiliar territory? What does Scripture have to do with our discernment and spiritual maturity? How can knowledge of the Bible help us discern good from evil?
10. Who ultimately is responsible for the spiritual maturity of a Christian—the individual or the church?

**- Christ-Centered Exposition
Commentary**

The Tragedy of Rejecting Full Revelation--part 1 ([Hebrews 5:11-14](#))

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ([5:11-14](#))

We have come to a section of Hebrews of which there are numerous and often conflicting interpretations, even among evangelicals. The overall passage is [5:11-6:12](#), and deals with spiritual maturity. The first two parts ([5:11-14](#) and [6:1-8](#)) are, I believe, addressed to unbelievers, whereas the third ([6:9-12](#)) is to believers.

The Contrast between Christianity and Judaism

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the many comparisons and contrasts are basically between Christianity and Judaism. This truth is essential to proper interpretation of the epistle.

Most books of the Bible have a major theme, or a group of closely related themes. **One of the first rules of sound biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) is to discover this central theme and to render all other interpretations in light of it.**

The gospel of John, for example, contains many profound and wonderful truths about God and His plan for man. But the central, overriding message of that gospel is the deity of Jesus Christ. A person who misses this truth cannot fully and properly understand the other truths that John presents in the book.

The central theme and message of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, that is, of Christianity to Judaism.

Within this theme are the subthemes of the superiority of the new priesthood to the old, the new sacrifice to the old ones, the new Mediator to the old ones, and so on. This is the key that unlocks every section of Hebrews, and to use any other key is, I believe, to make forced entry.

In the book of Hebrews the Holy Spirit is not contrasting two kinds of Christianity. He is not contrasting immature Christians and mature ones. He is contrasting Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. He is contrasting the substance and the shadow, the pattern and the reality, the visible and the invisible, the facsimile and the real thing, the type and the anti-type, the picture and the actual.

The Old Testament essentially is God's revelation of pictures and types, which are fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews, therefore, compares and contrasts the two parts of God's revelation that our division of the Bible reflects.

A Third Warning

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ([5:11](#))

Him, of course, refers to Melchizedek, who has just been mentioned ([vv. 6, 10](#)). Before he explains the order of Melchizedek (in chap. 7), however, the writer gives his third parenthetical warning. **As we have already noted, interspersed throughout Hebrews are several warnings to the intellectually convinced Jews who were on the edge of decision but had not yet come to faith in Christ. These warnings could also function in the context of encouragement and counsel to those Jews who had trusted Christ but were being tempted to turn back into Judaism because of doubts, criticism, and, for some, even persecution. But the main thrust was to unbelievers.**

The first warning ([2:1-4](#)) was about their neglecting the gospel, and

the second ([3:7-19](#)) was about hardening their hearts to it.

The third warning concerns spiritual maturity—the danger of staying with the elemental truths and promises of the Old Covenant, now that it has been superseded by the New. This warning is also, I believe, to the same group as are the other two—to unbelieving Jews who knew a great deal about the gospel but who had not gone all the way to accepting it for themselves. **Some may have made a shallow profession of faith but not actually believed. They are told of the danger of not claiming the blessing of the New Covenant, apart from which they cannot have eternal life. They are close, yet so far away.**

Unbelieving Babes

There are, of course, many exhortations in the New Testament for immature Christians to grow up. Throughout the history of the church there has been need for such counsel, but I do not think that is what is given here. **He is saying to hesitant Jews still hanging on to Judaism, "Come on to completeness, to maturity, in the New Covenant." This interpretation is not the most traditional, but I think it is consistent with the context of the whole book and is defensible. The warning and the appeal, as before, are evangelistic.**

The maturity being called for is not that of a Christian's growing in the faith, but of an unbeliever's coming into the faith—into the full-grown, mature truths and blessings of the New Covenant. It is the same maturity or perfection (from *teleioō*) as in [10:1](#) and [14](#), which can only refer to salvation, not Christian growth.

The Old Covenant was the spiritual alphabet. The Old Covenant was the baby talk, the letters and the sounds of a child's first vocabulary. You do not use an encyclopedia to start teaching a child to read. You use pictures and other visual objects. You point to the picture or the object and say, "This is a ball. That is a horse. This is a fish." Later on you begin explaining these things. You tell him that balls are round, horses eat hay, and that fish "breathe" water. God's revelation to man progressed in a similar way. The Old Testament was His elementary, foundational teaching. It began with "pictures." God was saying, in effect, "This is a feast you are to celebrate. This is

a sacrifice you must make. These are the clothes a high priest should wear, and this is a ceremonial washing that is required for certain occasions." Each had purposes and benefits for the times for which it was given. But primarily they were pictures of things to come, which the people were not then ready to understand. They were symbols and shadows of realities in Christ and the New Covenant (Col. 2:17).

Now that the New Covenant had come in Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews is saying to his fellow Jews, "Leave the pictures, the milk and baby food, of the Old Testament. Come to the fulfilled realities and the solid food of the New Testament. Leave Judaism and come to Christ."

Dullness Prevents Understanding

So before they could possibly understand the significance of Jesus' priesthood being like Melchizedek's, the readers needed to get beyond their limited, immature understanding of God. A key mark of that immaturity was simply dullness of hearing, spiritual lethargy.

The relation of Melchizedek and his priesthood to Christ is rich and meaningful, and important to the flow of the book, but it cannot be understood by unbelievers, even ones who intellectually accept the gospel. *"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually appraised"* (1 Cor. 2:14). These borderline believers were being told that there was no use going into the deeper things of the New Covenant at that time, because they had become **dull of hearing**.

Dull comes from the **Greek *nōthros***, which is made up of the words for "no" and "push." Literally, therefore, it means "no push"—slow, sluggish. When used of a person it generally meant intellectually numb or thick. In the context of this passage, however, it primarily indicates spiritual dullness.

When a person is spiritually dull, he is difficult to teach. These Jews had been lulled into sleep because of neglect and hardness of heart, and they would have to awaken and become alert if they were to appreciate the truth, significance, and necessity of the New Covenant.

They could not truly understand the gospel, of course, until they put their trust in the Bearer of the gospel. To be able to see its importance, they had to spiritually "wake up and pay attention."

These lethargic unbelievers have many counterparts today. People hear the gospel and are stirred and excited. Spiritual understanding appears to begin, but the more they hear it without accepting it, the more spiritually sluggish they become. They neglect to act on the truth they know and become more and more hardened to it, often while claiming to admire and respect it. They become more and more insulated from spiritual truth and understanding, and from spiritual life itself.

Though, as we have noted, this passage is not addressed to believers, the same principle applies. **When we do not trust and act on any part of God's truth that we know, we become hardened to it and less and less likely to benefit from it.** Or when we avoid delving into the deeper parts of God's Word, being satisfied with the "basics," we insulate ourselves from the Holy Spirit to that extent. **From a somewhat different**

perspective, a teacher or preacher can suffer spiritually when he does not bother to teach and preach the deeper, and sometimes harder, truths of Scripture—or is afraid to do so.
The more he resists or neglects to teach them, the less they will mean to him.

Paul was able to say that he did not fail to declare the whole counsel, or purpose, of God (Acts 20:27). He would not skip over or neglect any part of God's Word. No faithful servant of God will accommodate his teaching to the dull, lazy Christian.

Dullness Is Gradual

The implication of 5:11 is that those who were dull of hearing had once been alert and interested, perhaps even eager, to learn more of the gospel. **They did not start out dull; they became that way gradually.** These were doubtlessly among the ones who had "once been enlightened" and had "tasted of the heavenly gift" ([6:4](#)).

At one time they had been stirred and moved and open. They were once on the brink of salvation. By now, however, they had sunk into a rather settled state of spiritual stupor.

Dullness Is Unproductive

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. ([5:12](#))

Because of the length of time they had been under instruction of New Testament truth, they should have known enough to be teaching it themselves. But because they had never truly accepted it, they had not grown in it—and *could not* grow in it. They had been exposed to a great deal of God's truth, on most of which they could probably have passed an examination.

They had the truth in a certain factual and superficial way, but the truth did not have them.

Paul charged in **Romans**, "*But if you bear the name 'Jew,' and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?*" ([2:17-21](#)). In other words, they prided themselves in the idea that they were great religious teachers. But in Hebrews the Holy Spirit says explicitly what is implicit in the passage from Romans: these Jews not only were unqualified to teach, but needed to go back to kindergarten. They did not understand the ABCs of their own faith. That was evident by their unwillingness to recognize its clear fulfillment.

I have known many professing Christians like that, some of them well-known theologians. They know Scripture and the

biblical languages well. They know what the Bible says. But they do not know, or accept, what it means. For the time and study they have put in, they ought to be teachers of the Word of God. But **they do not even comprehend its fundamentals.**

They have been "advanced" students of Scripture for decades, and yet they do not even know Jesus Christ. They may teach, but it is not the pure Word of Christ that they teach.

Some years ago at a Christian youth conference I spoke on choosing the right life partner. After one session a young girl came up to me and asked to talk. As we sat on the chapel steps, she began telling me that her boyfriend said that whatever a person does, in sex or in anything else, is all right as long as no one else is hurt. After a little questioning I discovered that her boyfriend was 21 and she was only 14. When I briefly reminded her of what God says about sex outside of marriage, she hung her head and said, "I know that. You know what I need? I need to be saved." She explained that she not only had been raised in a church but that her father was a pastor. I replied, "Then you know how to be saved." "No," she said, "I don't. I have heard my father preach on it but I don't understand it."

Here was a perfect illustration of spiritual sluggishness. This girl had heard the gospel all her life, but she had rejected Jesus Christ for so long that the gospel now was foggy to her. She could not understand it anymore. She thought her father's sermons were boring and made no sense. She had become totally indifferent to God's Word. After I carefully delineated the gospel to her, we prayed together and she confessed Christ as her Lord and Savior.

Dullness Requires Being Taught Again

Because they had become spiritually listless, the informed but unbelieving Jews had **need again for someone to teach** them. Like the young girl mentioned above, **they needed to start all over in the elementary principles of the oracles of God.**

The First Principles of God's Oracles:

What are the elementary principles of the oracles of God? (Greek: *Stoicheia*) means that which comes first.

In reference to language, it meant the letters of the alphabet as the basic parts of words—the ABCs. In science it was used of the basic physical elements, and in math of the basics of proof.

Oracles of God does not refer to the gospel. Those being addressed were Jews, and to them the oracles of God meant the Old Testament.

The oracles of God were the laws of God, the mind of God revealed in the Old Testament. Having been entrusted with God's oracles was a great advantage for the Jews ([Rom. 3:1-2](#)). It was the rudiments of the Old Testament revelation, the law, that they needed to be taught again. **They had had considerable exposure to the New Covenant, but they did not even comprehend the Old, as evidenced by their lack of ability to handle deeper truth about Melchizedek.**

These Jews did not even understand the meaning of their own law.

They needed someone to go back and show them the pictures again.

They were not ready to read a book; they had to go back to the ABCs—the elementary picture—truths of ordinances, ceremonies, sacrifices, holy days, washings.

These foreshadowed Christ, and they could not recognize Him unless they understood the pictures.

The Need to Become Mature

The Old Testament is the alphabet; the New Testament is the complete, mature message. **"Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:23-24).**

The law was a tutor, a child trainer, that taught the first and basic truths about God. In the New Covenant we are not under the tutor anymore. We have grown up.

That is the point being made here.

Christ has arrived, the shadows are replaced with substance, the picture-book is replaced with great writings that we can read. The alphabet is replaced with the full composition.

The types have given way to the truth.

Progress or Regress

Again they are told, you have come (cf. [v. 11](#), "you have become"). A baby does not come to need milk. He is born with that need. The only person who *comes* to need milk, to need baby food, is one who has gone back to childhood. **Instead of becoming more mature, these Jews were becoming less. They were slipping back into spiritual infancy.**

If you do not progress you regress.

By neglect and hardness they had come to the place where they could only handle **milk** again.

It is easy for people to hear the gospel, and then hear it and hear it and hear it until it becomes commonplace and meaningless to them.

Instead of pursuing the truth of Christ and giving their lives to Him, they become spiritually sluggish and stagnant. They become dull of hearing and slow of understanding, spiritually retarded. They must be fed again like babies.

These Jews who had so long spurned Christ, some of them while professing His name, were not able to take the heavy food of Melchizedek priesthood truth. They would have to start again from the bottom up, gradually increasing their spiritual perception and understanding.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ([5:13](#))

A spiritual infant is **not accustomed** (*apeiros*) to deeper truths. He cannot digest them, any more than a physical infant can digest a steak. The idea is that of being inexperienced, unskillful, and therefore unprepared and incapable. The spiritual system, like the physical, has to grow in order to handle that which is more difficult.

A child can get something out of looking at a picture-book but nothing out of looking at a textbook. A spiritual child could get some meaning out of the pictures and types of the Old Testament but not out of the **word of righteousness** of the gospel.

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ([5:14](#))

The contrast here is simple.

The one who continues to feed only on God's elementary revelations is not going to grow, not going to have any discernment.

A small child will stick almost anything into his mouth, touch anything he can reach, go anywhere he can manage to crawl—with no concept of what is good for him and what is bad, what is helpful and what is dangerous. The mature adult, on the other hand, has developed considerable discernment. He is careful about what he eats, what he does, where he goes.

The same principle operates in the spiritual realm. The **mature** believer has discernment about what is right and wrong, true and false, helpful and harmful, righteous and unrighteous.

But because the writer *does*, in chapter 7, go on to explain the significance of the order of Melchizedek, it seems he expects his readers to mature spiritually before they read this part of his message. That is, he seems to believe they will soon be saved, for it is only salvation, the new birth, that could immediately put them on the level of spiritual maturity necessary to understand **the word of righteousness**. He seems to say, "Leave Judaism and, in the instant of salvation, grow up." Judaism is the infancy they are to leave in order to go on to the maturity of manhood by faith in the New Covenant Messiah.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Pilgrims Should Make Progress
[Hebrews 5:11-6:20](#)

The Marks of Spiritual Immaturity (Heb. 5:11-14)

The writer is about to begin his explanation of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, but he is not sure his readers are ready for what he has to teach. The problem is not that he is a dull teacher, but that they are dull hearers! **The word translated "dull" in Hebrews 5:11 is translated "slothful" in Hebrews 6:12. It refers to a condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development.**

What, then, are **the marks of spiritual immaturity?**

Dullness toward the Word (v. 11). These... started on their "backward journey" **by drifting from the Word** ([Heb. 2:1-4](#)), and then **doubting the Word** ([Heb. 3:7-4:13](#)). As a result, they were now "dull of hearing"; that is, unable to listen to the Word, receive it, and act on it.

They did not have the attitude of the Thessalonians: *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe"* ([1 Thes. 2:13](#)).

One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself.

Inability to share (v. 12a). **The ability to share spiritual truth with others is a mark of maturity. Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but all can share what they learn from the Word.** One of the hardest lessons children must learn is the lesson of sharing. The recipients of this letter had been saved long enough to be able to share God's truth with others. But, **instead of helping others to grow, these Hebrew Christians were in need of learning *again* the simple teachings of the Christian life. They were experiencing a second childhood!**

A "baby food" diet (vv. 12b-13). **Milk is predigested food, and it is specially suited to babies.** But only those who have teeth can enjoy meat. **The writer defines the "milk" as "the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12).** The "meat" of the Word is the teaching about our Lord's ministry *now* in heaven as our High Priest. The writer wanted to give this "meat" to them, but they were not ready for it.

The "milk" of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ did on earth—His birth, life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection. The "meat" of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven. We begin the Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth. We grow in the Christian life on the basis of His unfinished work in heaven.

Of course, even the maturest adult never outgrows milk. As believers, we can still learn much from our Lord's work on earth. *But we must not stop there!* We must make spiritual progress, and we can do this only if we learn about Christ's priestly ministry for us in heaven. (See [Heb. 13:20-21](#) for a summary of what the Lord wants to do for His people now.)

Unskillful in using the Word (v. 14). **As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our "spiritual senses" and develop spiritual discernment.** It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. **A baby will put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures.**

Just as our physical bodies have senses without which we could not function, so our inner "spiritual man" has "spiritual senses." For example: "O taste and see that the Lord is good" ([Ps. 34:8](#)). "But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear" ([Matt. 13:16](#)). **As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner "spiritual senses" get their exercise and become strong and keen. Paul called this process exercising ourselves unto godliness ([1 Tim. 4:7-8](#)).**

The ability to discern good and evil is a vital part of Christian maturity. The nation of Israel in Moses' day lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance. The readers of this letter were in danger of making the same mistake. It is impossible to stand still in the Christian life: we either go forward and claim God's blessing, or we go backward and wander about aimlessly.

- Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Confident (Hebrews).

What are the oracles of God?

Question: "What are the oracles of God?"

Answer: There are several places in the Bible that mention the oracles of God.

In the New Testament, the term *oracles of God* refers to the Word of God; in the Old Testament, it sometimes refers to a part of the temple. Not all English translations contain the phrase *oracles of God*, so it depends on what version one is reading from.

The New Testament Greek phrase sometimes translated “oracles of God” is logion Theou (logion being the plural form of logos). “Words of God” is a good translation. The KJV, ESV, NASB, and some other versions put “oracles of God.” This is a fine translation, too, as long as we define oracle properly.

In modern usage the word *oracle* often refers to a person, specifically a priest or medium through whom gods or spirits speak. An oracle can also be the place where the priest or medium receives divine messages. But an older definition of *oracle*, and the one used by some Bible translators, is “a message from God.” **The “oracles of God” in the New Testament are the messages or words of God. In Acts 7:38**, Stephen speaks of how Moses received “living oracles to give to us” (ESV)—a reference to the life-giving nature of God’s Word.

Romans 3:2 mentions the oracles of God in the ESV: **“To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.”**

Paul highlights the fact that the Jews who received, copied, and preserved the [Tanakh](#) had been entrusted with the very Word of God. This was an advantage to the Jews because it meant the gospel would be preached to them first and then to the Gentiles. Of course, this advantage was only applicable to those who believed the gospel, as Paul states in the verses that follow. Truly the good news, as Paul continues, is that both Jews and Gentiles now have access to righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ ([Romans 3:21-22](#)).

[Hebrews 5:12](#) also speaks of the oracles of God in the NASB: ***“You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”***

Again, the “oracles of God” here are the words of God. The writer of Hebrews says his readers should have moved beyond the basic principles of God’s Word and on to “meatier” subjects; instead, they are like babies who are not ready for solid food (verses 13-14).

[First Peter 4:11](#) mentions the oracles of God in the KJV: ***“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.”***

In this context Peter instructs us to be extremely careful with the gifts we receive from God (verse 10).

Our words should be chosen wisely and spoken as if we are speaking the very words (oracles) of God. When we quote Scripture and expound on its meaning, we actually are speaking the oracles of God.

Peter states the goal of our use of words: “So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (verse 11).

In [2 Samuel 16:23](#), the “oracle of God” (KJV) that gave Ahithophel wisdom means “the Word of God” or, more specifically, “a divine utterance delivered to man.” Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the “oracle of God” refers to the place where God dwelt—the [Most Holy Place](#) in the temple that contained the [Ark of the Covenant](#)—and thus the place where inquiry could be made about God’s wisdom, will, and word (see [1 Kings 6:5](#) and [19](#) in the KJV).

Recommended Resource: [Making Sense of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation by Geisler & Howe](#)