

Heb. 5:11-14 Spiritual Immaturity

At this point in the text, the author was speaking of the priesthood of Christ, particularly the priesthood of Aaron and how it was a type of Christ. And then he introduces a new type of the priesthood of Christ, Melchizedek (4:6, 10). And then, he stops and considers his hearers. And from 5:11 to 6:12 he adds a parenthesis. He is teaching, teaching, teaching, on the superiority of Christ's priesthood to Aaron. And then, he realizes many of his listeners are not understanding something they SHOULD understand, and some of them are even in danger of apostasy. He says they are "spiritually immature" and must address them as such before moving on. Listen to his words in vv. 11-14 (read) as we consider our topic today. I have 5 truths from our text on the realities of spiritual immaturity. The Spiritually Immature: 1) Cannot understand advanced truth, 2) Is always relearning the same truths, 3) Can never become a teacher, 4) Cannot apply truth in his own life, and 5) Is in danger of apostasy.

1. The Spiritually Immature Person Cannot Understand Advanced Truth. In other words, the one who is immature has great difficulty understanding deeper truths of doctrine. Their understanding of doctrine does not grow and mature beyond what we might call the "basics." Look at 6:1: "**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.**" Why is this? They are "dull of hearing." Look at v. 11: "**About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**" The root here is "lazy" or "sluggish." The meaning here is "mental sloth." I think this describes all of us at one time or another during class. I remember math class from time to time as the teacher would try and explain difficult concepts and my mind would just shut down, and at that moment there is no way I am understanding that truth. And I don't even try. It is like a perpetual daydream of the mind. To a person in this state, it is very difficult to explain anything, even if it were something simple. This is how our author explains some of those Hebrew Christians.

Now, this doesn't mean that these doctrines are difficult in and of themselves. And, they aren't really hard to explain. This is not what he is saying. He is saying, "*Even if I were to explain them in the most simple way possible, you still would not understand.*" Your ears are dull. You are lazy, or, "slothful" in your ability to comprehend doctrine. Personally, I go through times physically, where all I want to do is sit on the couch or go to my chair and read. And from there I want to get more coffee with sweet creamer and eat unhealthy stuff. Many of us know what I am talking about. And when these times abound, we tend to neglect exercise. And if this continues over time, just a minimal amount of exercise is such a duty, and we don't really enjoy it. Well, this is what the author is saying about his readers. But they were not always so. When the gospel came to them they received it with eagerness. It aroused their attention, it exercised their thoughts. When they heard of Christ and his commands they were excited. They loved to sit and contemplate the deep things of God in Christ. But now, their ears were dull. And the things of Christ were commonplace. And though they heard the author's teaching on Melchizedek, they really didn't make the effort to understand these truths.

We must ask ourselves if this is true of us. Is this true of you? Could the apostle Paul say to you as he did to the Galatians, "**You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?**" (Gal. 5:7). A.W. Pink says, "*By the very law of our constitution, if we do not move*

forward we move backward.” I wonder how many Christians sit in churches week after week after week and sit under teaching with “dull ears,” unable to understand. Brothers and sisters, many who sit in churches want sermons that only “tickle their ears.” They refuse to move on to deeper things. Let’s move on.

2. The Spiritually Immature Person Is Always Relearning the Same Truths. Look at v. 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.”** He uses the picture of milk vs. solid food. An infant can only drink milk, that’s all. His/her little body is not prepared for steak . . . yet. We all know this! We cannot give an infant a T-Bone steak. He is saying, “You should have progressed further, but you have not. You are like an infant in your understanding. Therefore, I can only give you milk, over and over again. Here, he compares “milk” with the basic principles of the oracles of God. Let’s not forget our context. The author is teaching about the New Covenant in Christ. And he is explaining how Christ has fulfilled all the promises to which Mosaic Law pointed. And I believe they were mixing Mosaic Law and gospel in an unhealthy way. And they were misapplying Mosaic Law in light of Christ. And some of them were even in danger of rejecting Christ altogether. Look at 6:1 ff. **“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, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”**

Can you imagine coming to my house for supper and we sit down together to enjoy a five-course milk meal? And then I come to your house for supper the next week and you serve me a 7-course meal of milk? And through it all, we are satisfied with that milk. I believe our author is saying, *“I like the milk. It is necessary. But, give me the steak.”* This is our picture. When our ears are dull and we are “lazy” spiritually, we are only ready to drink milk over and over again. And as we’ve said, we don’t even understand things we’ve learned already, which is why he says they need to be retaught the same things over and over again, as if they’ve even forgotten what milk tastes like, much less steak. In this way they’ve digressed.

App. We never leave the basic truths of the gospel. But, we add and learn other doctrines connected to the gospel. I think of baseball and the fundamentals. We cannot be successful without throwing, catching, receiving a ground ball, the crow-hop from the outfield, hitting the cut-off man. Therefore, we keep pressing those things. But, at the same time, we build on those things. We put in bunt defenses and pick off moves and new trick plays to catch our opponent. We develop our swing with specific mechanics, etc. In the same kind of way, we always remember the gospel and the basics, but we build upon those things. (Even as the author of Hebrews did with Melchizedek.) I think 1 Cor. 15:1-4: **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .”** These are the basics. But, as the OT says, we build precept upon precept, etc. Therefore, press hard on the basics of the gospel. For these are the

simple truths we have received. But, then move on to maturity as we build. (so far we're only speaking of doctrine. There is an ethical side. For faith without works is dead. See #4 below.)

3. The Spiritually Immature Person Can Never Become a Teacher. Look at v. 12 again. **“For though by this time you ought to be teachers . . .”** This is an amazing statement. Because, under Mosaic Law, the teachers were the priests, and then later the prophets. And now the author is saying, *“all of you should be teachers.”* Under the old covenant the teachers were the priests and the prophets. But, under the new covenant, who are the teachers. Think of Jesus' command in Matt. 28:18-20. **“As you go, make disciples . . .”** And what comes next? **“Teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.”** Brothers and sisters, YES, there are those who are gifted teachers. But, in the general sense, ALL God's new covenant people are teachers. This means that our aim is to tell people about Jesus, and when they receive him, bring them along, move them from immaturity to maturity. And this text says that those who are spiritually immature, cannot, or, are not effective at making disciples. And I think the reason is that all they can handle is “milk.” They are not able to move beyond the basics of the gospel and teach others so they can grow into maturity.

So, let me ask some questions by way of application. Is this way you think when you meet with other Christians? Are you thinking, *“How can I teach you?”* or *“How can I help you grow in your faith?”* *“How can I help you apply the truths of the gospel in your life?”* I think of the Apostle Paul who desires to visit the believers in Rome. He says, **“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—”** (Rom. 1:11). Or do you say, *“Oh, that's for the pastor.”* Or, is it normal for you to defer to someone else who you think is more capable? Brothers and sisters, according to this verse, ALL of us should be “teachers.”

Now, I get it. We are all at different places in our growth. And, the way we've done church in the past is to do our discipleship at a building with only a select few doing the teaching. This is ok. We should see this aspect. For there ARE those of us who are more gifted at teaching. But, at the everyday level, all of us are teachers as we make disciples. And, as we grow, we must come to a time where we understand doctrine and deeper truths about Christ and the gospel where we are able to teach others the commands of Christ and bring them along. I think of Christian counseling. We immediately defer when someone needs counseling. And it may be the case where more expertise is needed outside the church. But, this must not be our default. And I think a lot of this responsibility does fall upon your elders. We are commanded to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:12). But, at the end of the day, this command to “teach” or to “make disciples” is for all of us. And if over a period of many years we do not find ourselves as a whole able to teach others, we are spiritually immature. (Recall Titus 2)

4. The Spiritually Immature Person Cannot Apply Truth. Look at vv. 13-14: **“for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 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.”** Some say to be “unskilled in the word of righteousness” is speaking of doctrine. This is certainly true as we've seen. But, there is more. This text is very practical as it connects doctrine with living. The mature Christian understands the truths of the gospel and then can apply them to his/her life in making decisions between good and evil. At the end of the day, how do you a person is a Christian. Well, only God knows the

heart. But, Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruits.” A mature Christian is able to understand the Gospel of Christ and then apply those truths in day to day living. This is evident in godliness. This is why the NT puts so much emphasis on the leaders of the church having a certain character. Look over at Titus 1:7-9: **“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”** But, these instructions are for all Christians. So let me ask, *“Have you so embraced the gospel of Christ “trustworthy word as taught,” and then, how able are you to make godly decisions?”* So often I hear Christians asking, “what is the will of God in my life.” And they search and look for signs. But, what is God’s will for your life? 1 Thess. 4:3 says, **“This is the will of God, your sanctification.”**

5. The Spiritually Immature Person Is in Danger of Apostasy. I will only mention this today as we will delve into this topic over the next two weeks. But, vv. 11-14 must be read in the context of 6:1-12. Look quickly at 6:4 ff. **“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have taste the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”** Our author is giving a warning that there is the danger of apostasy. I do not think this will be the majority of his readers because he says over in 6:9: **“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.”** He does believe that they will move on to maturity. But, our passage today serves as an early warning sign of apostasy. Let me remind us of his warnings so far. In 2:1: **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away.”** And 2:3: **“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation.”** And 3:12: **“Take care, brothers lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”** And 4:1: **“Let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”**

I think our author, right in the middle of teaching about Christ’s earthly and heavenly priesthood, he realizes some are not able to get it because of their spiritual immaturity. And if they do not listen and begin to move on, they are in danger of apostasy. Brothers and sisters, these warnings are for us! They are not for “hypothetical” believers. They are God’s means to keep us moving along to maturity. Therefore, we must with all seriousness take these words to heart. We must ask ourselves, *“Am I a growing Christian? Am I spiritually mature?”* Do I understand the gospel and am I learning to love and understand deeper truths? Am I constantly having to relearn the same basic truths over and over? Am I able to teach others and bring THEM along to maturity? Am I become more and more godly? Is my ability to discern between good and evil growing every year God gives? We must ask such questions as we come to this text? If not, we are like James says: looking into the mirror and forgetting what we look like (James 1:23). This goes for all of us! We must “take heed lest we should fall.” These words are for us.

Pastorally, I know these words are difficult as a warning. But they are necessary! A.W. Pink says, “*Just as long as Christians have the flesh in them and are subject to the assaults of the Devil, do they need constant warning; and just so long as they are harassed by indwelling sin and are left in a hostile world, do they stand in need of heavenly encouragement. All effective ministry to the saints proceeds along these two lines, alternating from the one to the other.*” As a pastor, I am afraid that more often than not, I do the first. And I thank you for your love for me in putting up with me in this way. For love covers a multitude of sins. We are in this together. I take seriously the words of Paul in 1 Tim. 4:12 to be an “example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity . . . so that all may see my progress.” Again, we are in this together. Pray for me and your elders . . . As we pray for you! May we move on to maturity!

With that in mind, I want to encourage us with some words at the end of this section in Hebrews: 6:9-12: “**Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**”