

**Hebrews 5: 12-14; “Having Our Senses Exercised”, Sermon # 20 in the series –  
“Holding Fast our Confession”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ has many profound mysteries bound up in it. It is the main ground of our salvation. We have seen in previous verses that our Savior has two perfect natures in His one blessed Being; one human and one Divine. Even though He was perfect as the Son, yet He had to learn obedience through the things that He suffered. If this was the case, then You and I as Christians need to see that we also have many things to learn, both doctrinally and practically, in living our life to God in a way which will glorify Him. This process of becoming mature in this holy way is called “going on to perfection” in chapter 6, verse 1.

Here in these verses we will be looking at the importance of our using our spiritual senses to discern what is good and evil. In this message, I want to speak to you 1<sup>st</sup> – About the dullness that a Christian can fall into if they are not careful. And then 2<sup>nd</sup> – About the training in righteousness which we as Christians should be pursuing. We are going to see here that being a mature Christian means much more than simply being orthodox in your theology; it means that you will be pressing on toward the perfection that God expects of you by learning to keep all of His commandments out of love to your Lord.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – I want to speak to you about the dullness that a Christian can fall into.**

Verses 11-13 say – “Concerning Melchizedek, and Christ, Paul says, we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” “For by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first 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 unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.” Well, you can see by these verses what the expectation of God is, concerning all Christians. It is that over time that we ought to be able to become teachers of others around us, at least in regard to the first principles of the oracles of God.

What are the first principles of the oracles of God? They are the truths of the gospel and the word of God. They are those truths which give us to understand that we are sinners by nature and practice; that we must have Christ in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins, and a New Heart whereby we can serve God in accordance with His word. And so, having believed in the gospel, unto salvation, we must continue to seek to grow in grace and add to our knowledge of God’s word. We do this by our daily praying to God to know what we can do to honor Him, and to please Him, by the way that we live. We meditate upon His word, His promises and His commandments, day and night.

Joshua 1: 8 and 9 – “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.” “For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” “Have I not commanded you?” “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” This is the opposite of being dull; this meditation is. For day and night you are meditating upon His word that you may observe it to do it. Dullness will not meditate on God’s word. Dullness says – Does it really make any difference?

But it really does make a difference in every way; spiritually speaking. For if you meditate day and night, which involves diligence, and the exercise of faith; you are saying that you believe His promise, that if you meditate upon His promises and you seek Him by means of prayer, that spiritual prosperity will come to you, and you will have good success. You also realize your responsibility toward other people around you as well; that when you are having good success yourself, in understanding and doing what God instructs you to do in His word, you want to teach others what it means to know God and to serve God.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 15, verse 14. “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” Paul is saying that when you are full of the grace of goodness, which comes from having a right heart towards God, and love for brethren, and you are filled with all knowledge from God’s word, then you are able to admonish others. You are able to teach them the first principles of the oracles of God.

I am told that in the early church that they had men who were called “catechizers” who would teach people the basics of the faith. They actually had ministers who were set apart for this particular duty, and all that were admitted to the church, were, from time to time, catechized and instructed in the principles of the Christian religion. From the time of their entrance in to the church, until they were judged fit to partake of the Lord’s Supper they received this instruction. They were called “the catechized”, or “the disciples of the catechizers”.

This is why in the Adult Sunday School I have taken you through the 1689 Confession for so many years. It is like having an ongoing membership class; instructing all who come in the doctrines of our faith. This is also why my wife Jenni catechizes the children at the Bible Club. By catechizing, a foundation is laid in Biblical truth, for those who have come to saving faith. And no doubt there have been children and others who have come to saving faith through this means.

The difference between catechizing and preaching is this. In preaching, the truth of the word of God is declared by the preacher to the congregation. He is the appointed herald of the word. He sets forth the word so that it will be received by the listeners as God’s speaking to them a word in due season, a word for the conviction of their hearts, a word for their being built up in their faith, a word which will strengthen the souls of those listening, in their faith and in their duty, and the gospel for the unbelieving. If you are attentive in a holy way, you will receive God’s word, and you will apply it to yourself; the Holy Spirit striving and working in your heart so that you will believe it, and act upon it.

Catechism is usually done in a question and answer format. The catechist asks you a question related to doctrinal truth, and then he gives you the answer. And then once you hear the answer, then you repeat it back to the catechist when you are called upon to do so. And then, it is understood both by you, the learner, and by the catechist who is instructing you, that the truth is being comprehended by you. And then, hopefully, it will be remembered by you, the one who is learning.

The Christian life is the life of a disciple in just this way. A Christian is a learner and a doer according to what they have learned. But the spirit of the learner is very important also. A true disciple wants to press on to know Christ and to serve Christ and not be dull in spirit. In the case of these Hebrews that Paul was writing to, they had come to need the milk of the word rather than the meat because they were dull of hearing. Paul and others who were teaching them, realized that they had not made progress in righteousness. Their spiritual discernment of truth and what was most important was lacking in them so much that, now, they had to back to teaching them with the milk rather than the meat of the word.

Babes are those who need milk to drink. You do not give a babe meat to eat because he cannot take it. He cannot take it in, and he would have a hard time digesting it. But the problem here with these people who we are studying was that because of their dullness of hearing, they couldn’t receive the meat of the word because of their dullness of hearing. They had actually regressed with regard to their intake of the word. What did this mean practically? Well, it did not mean that weren’t hearing the word on a regular basis. They were in regular attendance at the gathering of the church. They were faithful in that way. Actually, what it meant, was that while they were taking the word in, in their minds they were not really actually thinking about it in personal terms.

If they had been thinking about it in personal terms, then it would have been affecting them in this important way; that they would sense that God Himself was speaking to them through the word preached, and it would make such impression upon their minds and hearts, that they would be changed by it. They would grow spiritually in their being righteous. They would in terms of their serving the Lord in righteousness. You see, they were unskilled in righteousness. Their spiritual senses needed to be exercised but they were not being exercised, to discern both good and evil. So spiritual dullness makes people unable to use God's word rightly. It is a declension in their spirit from the fervent interest that they once had, in terms of receiving spiritual truths, and then not pursuing the realities of experience that these truths would lead them to if they are consistent in acting upon them to obey God's word.

A person who is dull of understanding has forgotten that Christ Himself is looking for them to abide in Him Personally. He is looking for them to grow up into Him, spiritually speaking. He knows that when a Christian is not personally thinking of how they can become more and more like Him, Personally, in terms of their communion with Him, and their obedience to His word, and their faithfulness to Him, in terms of their giving themselves in service to His Church, that they have become dull of hearing. Sometimes when the spirit is dull of hearing, a person may conclude that since they have heard these good truths before, that they do not have to consciously work at listening.

And if they may fall into the unfortunate view, that they cannot personally be impressed with the minister, and His delivery of the message in some uniquely new way which would peak their interest, then they slowly and imperceptibly over time, may gradually leave off receiving the truth that is being preached to them. This dullness of spirit can eventually, then, become a habit, because a person does not pray and think about the way that they are listening. Perhaps they become skeptical that God will do anything great with them or with the church that they are a member of. And great spiritual declension is the result.

But brethren, this does not need to be. The way that you listen, the way that you hear, is of very great importance to your spiritual growth and maturity. Do you add faith to the preaching of the word? The Israelites of old did not do this and they did not really know the Lord many of them. When you listen to good preaching, you must take it to heart by thinking – What does God expect me to do with this truth? You must cry out to God in your heart while you are listening. Cry out that He might give you grace and that He might help you, so that you will receive the word with a hearing heart.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – Let's think about the training in righteousness which we as Christians should be pursuing.**

Verse 14 of chapter 5 – “But solid food is for those who are of full age (those who are mature), that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” You should understand that the Christian life is a life of growing up from being a babe to becoming a person who is an adult, spiritually speaking; one of full age. When you first come to Christ you are a babe spiritually, no matter how old you are, physically speaking. And the apostle Peter says in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2, verses 1 and 2 – “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

So the young Christian needs to begin exercising their spiritual discernment of what is right and wrong from the very beginning of their Christian life, Peter is saying here. He mentions certain things in particular. All malice, all thinking bad thoughts about other people to bring them down, all deceit; acting in a tricky way to get what you want, all hypocrisy, that is, play acting and pretending to be a Christian when actually you want the world and the things that will satisfy your flesh. All envy, that is being resentful or discontented because you look at what another person has been given in terms of their gifts and abilities and you wish that you had

them yourself. All of these things Peter says, must be laid aside, because it is a part of your training in righteousness. You cannot make progress in righteousness and holiness if you are tolerating these sinful attitudes in your life.

Unfortunately, some of these Hebrew folks that Paul was writing to, did not see themselves as immature in the faith. Some of them saw themselves as wise. We have an example of how it was with them, in Romans chapter 2, verses 17-24. “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, 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, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.” “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” “You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?” “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written.”

So, I hope that you see what the problem was with some of these people that Paul was addressing here, and in the text that we are studying in Hebrews as well. It was, that even though they boasted in God, and they knew His will, and they approved of the things that were excellent; even though they claimed to be a light to those who were in darkness, yet they were tolerating some amount of hypocrisy in their hearts. It was their heart obedience that was really lacking. Outwardly they looked all right. And they approved of what was right. But they were excusing their own heart sins, and not taking decided steps to deal with them.

And so, we need to see that there are some persons who call themselves Christians, and perhaps they are indeed true Christians, who because they do not exercise their senses in this good and godly way, they are not really making progress in their relationship with Christ. They are not pursuing holiness and righteousness as they should. The same problem existed at the church at Corinth. Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 1-4 – “And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.”

“I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able, for you are still carnal.” “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul’, and another, ‘I am of Apollos’, are you not carnal?” Now I hope that you will notice that Paul did not say that these believers at Corinth were carnal. No, he had to speak to them as though they were carnal; that is, as to babes in Christ. He had to feed them with milk and not solid food. There was envy, strife, and that led to divisions among them. And this was the indication that their hearts were not right.

With that kind of sinful mindset, they could never be anything more than babes in the faith. They would never grow up to maturity in the faith or be in a position to receive the meat of the word in their teaching. For if they were to hear that kind of preaching, they would misunderstand it, misapply it, and misuse it. Let us understand that a mature Christian does not have to fight and strive with other Christians over doctrine or practice in the church. No, they first of all need to humbly submit to God and His will in regard to the word, and then they need to learn to love the brethren in the way that they communicate the truth.

I find it very amazing, but it sometimes has been the case in the past, that a person may come to us, thinking that they want to join our church. And they may know, or they think that they know, many things about the Bible and doctrinal truth. I do not doubt that they may indeed have much Biblical knowledge in their mind. But as you begin to talk with them, and interact with them over what they are looking for in a church, you come to realize that they have very strong convictions of Biblical doctrine and church practice, but they do not manifest a love for the brethren that they have been around in the past when they speak of them.

And yet now, they think that they may want to join with us. They believe that they are mature because they have knowledge. But if they manifest a critical and unloving spirit towards others that they disagree with, they are really babes and carnal. Let us realize that it takes the love of Christ and the ability to love the brethren in order to be a God-glorifying member of a local church. It will never do for a man to see himself as superior to others in knowledge when he cannot love the brethren.

That is, if he speaks against them, and disqualifies them, because they do not believe in the doctrinal or practical truth of the Bible, in the exact way that he does. A person may be orthodox, but if their spirit is not right it will undo all the good that they would like see done, in establishing God's truth with other people. To be able to sit under the word as it is being preached requires humility to receive the word. You receive it from a man who although he is called by God, he himself is not yet perfect. But if that man is walking in the Spirit, and he is humble, it is his prayer that he will be able to teach you what the word says, and from what it says, what it means.

To be able to instruct others, you must be willing to see how Christ and the apostles communicated the truth, and to learn to communicate it in the same way; being wise and loving toward all the people who come to you, sincerely seeking the truth. Speaking the truth in love, so that all will grow up into Christ. These people at Corinth had divisions over whether Paul should be listened to, or Apollos. They divided up over this, and it showed the carnality which remained in their thinking. But if you are mature you will love God's law, all of His commandments; the Ten Commandments included, and the brethren.

Listen to Psalm 119: 97-104. "Oh, how I love Your law!" "It is my meditation all the day." "You, through Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me. "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation." "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts." "I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word." "I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me." "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" "Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way." Here in these verses we see how a Christian, by reason of use, exercises their senses to discern both good and evil. God's law is loved by them. God's law is a term which here refers to all of the written revelation of the Scriptures.

Here in this section of Psalm 119 we find David saying that it was his meditation all the day, even as we have thought about it before, in this sermon. This kind of meditation shows that the believer is moving toward maturity. They are learning to discern both good and evil. They have a right spirit and attitude towards God's moral law. They know that God through His commandments makes them wiser than their enemies. They do not pick and choose which of God's moral commands are to be kept.

They will receive all of the 10 Commandments as being moral, and study how to observe them evangelically; that is by faith in relation to Christ's having fulfilled all of them. They know that God's commandments will make them wiser than their enemies; those who try to turn them aside from keeping them. They know that if they keep God's testimonies and His precepts, that they will understand more than all the ancients; all of the older people who have lived for so many years, and have learned many things by human observation.

The believer in Christ has the desire to restrain their feet from every evil way, so that God's precious and holy word will be kept by them. They do not wickedly depart from God's judgments, His declarations of truth, for they realize, that by His Holy Spirit, that God Himself has been teaching them. God's word is sweet to them. They long for the wisdom that comes from the Scriptures, more than the taste of honey in their mouth. They know that it is by God's precepts and principles of truth and righteousness, that they get real understanding of how to keep the

commands of God in a way that will glorify Him and truly benefit others. It is through this holy interaction over the commandments of God, in fellowship with God Himself, that they get true understanding and learn to hate every false way.

Ah, that is so very good, is it not? So each of us must ask ourselves – Do I love all of God’s moral commands? Do I love all of His moral commands which are found in all the Bible, both Old Testament and New? Let’s not pit the moral commands of God in the Old Testament against those in the New, as though they are not seen together, by God and Christ, for our good. Yes, the Old Covenant is a different Covenant from the New, but remember that Jesus died having fulfilled the law. He had to fulfill all the moral commands of the Old in order to establish us in our salvation. Indeed, God’s law was in His heart. This means that the moral commands are still to be kept by us today, because we would be more like Him.

I know that all of God’s ceremonial law, which He gave to Moses to give to Israel, has been abrogated. It has been set aside. But, the moral law of God as our Confession states, “doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve it, but much strengthens this obligation.”

Romans 3: 27-31 – “Where is boasting then?” “It is excluded.” “By what law?” “Of works?” “No, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” “Or is He the God of the Jews only?” “Is He not also the God of the Gentiles?” “Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised though faith.” “Do we then make void the law through faith?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, we establish the law.” So, let us understand that this learning to keep all the commandments of God is certainly a part of the “solid food” that Paul is talking about in our text.

All of God’s moral commands are now in the hand of Christ who has fulfilled them all perfectly for us. He fulfilled them all and He gives them back to us, so that we might rejoice in them, and to keep them, out of love to God, and love for the brethren, and love for our neighbor. His commandments are not burdensome. Are there moral commandments which were given as a part of the Mosaic law something that we should be willing to keep as New Testament Christians? Yes. Let me give you an example of one. Leviticus 19: 17 – “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.” “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him.” “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”

These commands were given by God for the children of Israel to keep. And Christ no doubt fulfilled them all perfectly in Himself. All of God’s law was in His heart, and His love for God and His law came out in all of His actions of obedience. But when Christ fulfilled the law, it was not done so that it would be set aside by us, in regard to our obedience to God; but that we should be transformed more and more into the image of Christ by our having our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. It was Christ’s life and His example, which He gave to us, which interprets how these moral commands of both Old and New Testament are to be kept.

These commands are given to us so that when we will receive His living word of explanation and His example, of how we can love our neighbor as ourselves, as it is in Leviticus 19, and many other places in the New Testament. It should lead us prayerfully on, to think about how we might be a babe in relation to keeping these commands. Do we hate a brother in our heart? Do we rebuke him when he sins against us? Do we bear a grudge against any of the Lord’s people or children? Do we really love our neighbor as ourselves? Ah, this is solid food for the mature; those who are of full spiritual age.

