

## “SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE”

### I. Introduction

- A. This passage is a pause in the argument that the writer has been making about Jesus’ high priestly ministry.
  - 1. The interlude stretches from 5:11 through 6:19.
  - 2. We can see this by noting the similarities between 5:10 and 6:20.
  - 3. The former says that Jesus was “designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek” and the latter says that Jesus has “become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”
  - 4. But from 5:11-6:19 there is no mention either of Melchizedek or of Jesus’ high priestly ministry.
- B. The writer goes off on this rabbit trail because he knows that he needs to offer a word of admonition at this point.
  - 1. These Christians should be able to handle the things that he is about to tell them.
  - 2. They should be able to derive spiritual nourishment from this teaching, but they are not able to do so.
  - 3. This problem needs to be addressed before he can proceed any farther.
  - 4. In the verses that we are studying tonight, the problem is first explained and then its solution is offered.

### II. The Problem: Dullness of Hearing (5:11-14)

- A. The problem that the writer is confronting is spelled out in 5:11-14.
1. The writer tells them that while he has much to say to them, it is hard to explain.
  2. The difficulty is not due to any deficiency on the part of the writer of Hebrews.
  3. It should be obvious that this was a man who had a profound grasp of God's truth and great skill in communicating it.
  4. Nor is the teaching is hard to explain because the Word of God is unclear in its meaning or too complicated for the average person to understand.
  5. One of the hallmarks of Reformed theology is the doctrine of the perspicuity (or clarity) of Scripture.
  6. While we admit that there are parts of the Bible that are more difficult than others, we are convinced that the general sense of Scripture is so clear that, as our Confession of Faith explains, "not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." [WCF 1.7]
- B. The deficiency was not in the teacher or in the message; it was in the hearers themselves.
1. Christians have a responsibility to cultivate habits that will enable them to derive nourishment from the exposition of biblical doctrine.
  2. These Hebrew Christians had failed to do this.
  3. They had become "dull of hearing."
  4. The word "dull" means sluggish.

5. They were being lazy about their growth in the things of God.
  6. They were unwilling to move on to maturity in the faith because they were comfortable where they were.
- C. The writer knows that these Christians are in danger of committing apostasy.
1. How does he deal with this?
  2. He tells them that what they really need is to understand how Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.
  3. This is not what we would expect him to say.
  4. The fact that he handles this situation in this way is significant.
  5. It shows us that Christian doctrine is of the utmost importance for the Christian life.
  6. Sound doctrine is the antidote for potential apostasy.
  7. Faithfulness in the Christian life flows out of having accurate thoughts about God.
  8. This is why every Christian should strive to better understand everything that God has revealed in his Word.
- D. Notice that the writer says that these Christians have become dull of hearing.
1. This tells us that they weren't always this way.
  2. They had regressed.
  3. This is what happens when Christians fail to move on toward maturity in the faith.

4. You can't get by on youthful zeal forever.
  5. Those who don't become more mature in the faith inevitably become less mature.
  6. They revert to spiritual childhood.
  7. This leads Calvin to say that "We must, indeed, learn through life; for he alone is truly wise who owns that he is very far from perfect knowledge."
  8. Every Christian should strive to keep on making progress in the faith for as long as he or she remains in this world.
- E. The Hebrew Christians had been Christians long enough that they should have been able to instruct and encourage younger believers in the faith.
1. Instead, they needed someone to teach them the basic principles of the oracles of God.
  2. The term that is translated as "basic principles" refers to the rudiments of something.
  3. The writer is saying that these Christians needed to learn the ABC's of their religion all over again.
  4. That is not a good place to be.
  5. If a student doesn't have an understanding of the alphabet, he is not going to be able to get very far in reading and writing.
  6. He won't be able to see how things fit together because he doesn't have a solid grasp of the fundamentals.
  7. In the same way, a Christian who is not growing is not going to have any taste for solid teaching.
  8. He is not going to be able to appreciate it and benefit from it.

9. He will be bored by it because he won't be able to see how it connects to his life.
- F. Sometimes I am amazed by the fact that some of my favorite foods now are things that I absolutely detested as a child.
1. For example, I detested mushrooms as a child.
  2. I had a built-in mushroom detector.
  3. There was no way my Mom could sneak them into my food.
  4. If you had told me when I was 10 that I would love mushrooms as an adult, I would have told you that you were out of your mind.
  5. What happened?
  6. Well, I slowly developed a taste for them.
  7. Jonelle made one dish with mushrooms in it that I really liked, and over time I got to the point where I enjoy eating mushrooms in all sorts of things.
- G. As Christians, we need to cultivate a taste for the Word of God.
1. We can do this by practicing our faith and learning how to differentiate between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood.
  2. This is what the writer is talking about in verse 14 when he says that "solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."
  3. When you apply what you have been taught to the situations that you face, you begin to see how things fit together.

4. You begin to realize that sound Christian doctrine is essential for a faithful Christian life.

### III. The Solution: Move on from “Elementary” School (6:1-3)

- A. Having set forth the problem in 5:11-14, the writer then turns in 6:1-3 to give the solution.
  1. And once again, what he says here is not what we would expect him to say.
  2. He just told these Christians that they need someone to teach them the basics all over again.
  3. What would you expect him to start doing?
  4. You would think that he would start teaching them the basics again.
  5. But he doesn't do that.
  6. Instead, he says this: “let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.”
- B. The first thing that we need to understand about this statement is what the writer means by “leave.”
  1. He obviously doesn't want them to abandon the basics of the Christian faith.
  2. That is what they were being tempted to do.
  3. They were tempted to commit apostasy.
  4. When the writer says “let us leave” he means let us leave the elementary doctrine as the foundation and get to work building upon that foundation.

5. They need to move on from the rut that they have gotten themselves into, and that means leaving their immaturity behind and pressing forward in the faith.
  6. If they fail to do this, it will be as if they set out to build a house and, after laying the foundation, decided that that was good enough and that the job was done.
  7. The whole point of laying a foundation is to build something on top of it.
  8. The point of being a child is not to remain a child forever but to grow up to be an adult.
  9. In the same way, the point of becoming a Christian is to go on to maturity in the faith.
- C. Far too often, Christians fail to grow up to maturity.
1. The Reformers had to address this problem back in the 16th and 17th centuries.
  2. They realized that the members of their congregations did not know such Christian basics as the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.
  3. They responded to this problem by writing catechisms and using them to teach their people the faith.
  4. There is a similar lack of maturity in the evangelical world today.
  5. For a number of years now, there has been so much of an emphasis upon trying to make Christianity seem interesting and relevant to young people that there is very little depth to the faith of many believers.
  6. We need to be on guard against our culture's obsession with youth culture.

7. We need to remember that the point of being born again is the same as the point of being born the first time: to grow up.
- D. After telling the Hebrew Christians to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ as the foundation, the writer then lists what these elementary things are in three pairs of two.
1. One thing that we should note about all of the things listed here is that all of them were in continuity with the teachings of Judaism.
  2. Repentance and faith, washings and laying on of hands, resurrection and judgment — all of these things were affirmed by mainstream Jews in the first century.
  3. This indicates that these Hebrew Christians came to faith in Christ by being shown how the Christian faith is the fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament.
  4. This also explains how they could seriously consider abandoning Christianity to return to Judaism.
  5. Because they had not grown up in their faith, they didn't see much of a difference between Judaism and Christianity.
- E. The same kind of thing still happens today.
1. If a professing Christian never progresses beyond the thought that being a Christian has something to do with being a good person, then they are not likely to persevere in the faith when things get difficult.
  2. Why bother being a Christian when there are plenty of non-Christians who are interested in being good people.
  3. If we can't see what makes Christianity distinctive and unique, we will not be able to press on in it.



- F. The first pair of elementary doctrines listed in our text is repentance from dead works and faith toward God.
1. These two things are the heart of our response to the gospel.
  2. At conversion, we turn away from sin and turn to Christ.
  3. The works of fallen man are “dead” because they are corrupted by our sin and therefore lead to death.
  4. As Paul says in Romans 6, “what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” (Rom. 6:21)
  5. We cannot seek life by the way of works.
  6. This is why Edward Fisher says this when he sets forth the offer of the gospel, “here you are to work nothing, here you are to do nothing, here you are to render nothing unto God, but only to receive the treasure, which is Jesus Christ, and apprehend him in your heart by faith, although you be never so great a sinner; and so shall you obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal happiness; not as an agent but as a patient, not by doing but by receiving.” [*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 132]
- G. The second pair of elementary things is washings and the laying on of hands.
1. The term “washings” probably refers to the teaching that they would have received about the difference between baptism and Jewish purification rites.
  2. The laying on of hands probably refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit for those who were ordained to office in the church, a practice that stood in continuity with the Old Testament. (see Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9)
- H. The last pair of doctrines is the resurrection and eternal judgment.

1. Take note of the fact that both of these doctrines are described as “elementary” for the faith.
2. You can’t get rid of them without fatally compromising Christianity.
3. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ is not raised then we are still in our sins and our faith is futile.
4. And if there is no final judgment, then there is no hope that all that is wrong with this world will one day be set right.
5. Without a final judgment, there is no justice in the universe.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. We need to listen carefully to this passage’s admonition to go on to maturity in our faith.
  1. If we rest content in a state of immaturity, we will regress.
  2. We will be unable to benefit from the ministry that God provides for our ongoing spiritual sustenance.
- B. There is a clear sense of urgency in these verses, and this urgency is going to become even more pronounced in the verses that follow.
  1. Failure to move on to maturity in the faith has dire consequences.
  2. While this is true, we also need to bear in mind what the writer says in verse 3.
  3. He says, “this we will do if God permits.”
  4. This passage makes it very clear that we bear the responsibility for our progress in the faith.
  5. We need to press on toward maturity.

6. But this passage also reminds us that any progress that we make is the gift of God.
7. From the beginning of the Christian life to its end, we are always completely dependent upon God.