



15: Don't Be Stupid

"[Melchizedek] of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

For though 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. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Hebrews 5:11 – 14

The writer of Hebrews is out to show us that Jesus is a better high priest than any who have previously held the office: better even than Aaron himself. So far he has established that Jesus is qualified for the role in that He has both been appointed by God and He is able to sympathize with His people. But every priest appointed by God had to be a descendant of Levi and the high priest had to be a descendant of Aaron and Jesus was neither. So in order to further establish that Jesus is entitled to be called our high priest the writer has introduced the subject of the priesthood of Melchizedek. With two Old Testament verses, he has established that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Messiah is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Apparently the subject of Melchizedek's priesthood would have been a very controversial one among Jews of the day. The fact that Abraham treated Melchizedek with so much honor would have raised all kinds of questions and problems in their minds. So, you might imagine that the next logical step would be to explain what it means to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. The writer is going to do that in chapter 7, but before he does he goes off on another tangent. He has another warning for his readers and he explains why he's giving them this warning in verse 11 of chapter 5.

You've Become Stupid

This stuff about Melchizedek is important. The writer has a lot to say about him but he's finding it difficult to explain. He's concerned that his readers won't be able to take in what he has to say because they've become "dull of hearing." In the day, that was a common Greek term for someone of sluggish intelligence. In effect he's saying, I want to explain this but it's hard because you're too stupid to understand it. And notice he isn't saying that they have always been too stupid: they've become too stupid.

- ◆ *Have you ever encountered the kind of stupidity in spiritual things that the writer has in mind here? Give a few examples.*

You Should Be Teaching Others

The writer says that his readers ought to be teachers by this time (verse 12).

- ◆ *There is in that statement a clear implication that every believer is obliged to make progress in spiritual things and to pass what he has learned on to others. In what ways have you progressed over the years you have been a Christian? Do you think the progress you've made is what it should be in the light of your experience and the teaching you've received?*
- ◆ *In what ways do you teach others who are not as advanced in the faith as you are?*

Far from being the teachers they ought to be, the first recipients of this letter need to be taught “the first principles of the oracles of God” all over again. The first principles of the oracles of God are those basic building blocks of our faith that we are taught in the Bible. We'll be given a little more insight into what they might be when we come to chapter 6.

They have come to need milk and not solid food.¹ And notice again, that's not the way it has always been: they have come to need milk. Not only have they failed to progress and mature in knowledge and understanding; they have actually gone backwards.

- ◆ *It seems that there are deeper truths which those who are immature in the faith cannot understand. Can you think of some examples of truths like that? What happens when immature believers don't understand?*

In verses 13 and 14 the writer explains what it is that makes the difference between those who can take in deeper truths and those who can't.

You're A Big Baby

“Everyone who partakes only of milk.” There's nothing wrong with drinking milk. Adults drink milk, but it's not their exclusive diet. Similarly there's nothing wrong with a spiritual diet that includes going over the basics from time to time, but everyone who takes in only the very basics as his regular diet is “unskilled in the word of righteousness.” He's not accustomed working with the word of God. He's not used to handling it and he's not familiar and comfortable with it. He's a babe: He's immature.

Exercise Makes You Grow

On the other hand those who are mature — those who can handle solid spiritual food — are people who “because of practice have their senses trained to discern both good and evil” (verse 14). By habitual practice (that's the sense of the word that's used here) they have trained themselves. They have developed their powers of perception and their ability to understand to the point where they are able to discern — to judge and distinguish — the difference between what's right and what's wrong. There's no easy path to spiritual maturity.

- ◆ *How do you plan to train yourself “to discern both good and evil” by habitual practice?*

You Need To Grow Up

With regard to the spiritual life at least, failure to progress doesn't mean standing still. Failure to progress means falling into stupidity and inability to understand. It also means inability to properly discern between right and wrong, and when you lack that ability you're in great danger.

“Tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”

Ephesians 4:14

That's why the writer has turned aside from his main argument again to give us this warning and to remind us that progress to maturity calls for some hard work.

- ◆ *If you are not happy with the progress you have made over the years you've been a Christian, why do you think your growth has been so slow? What do you plan to do about that?*

¹ cf 1 Corinthians 3:1