

2,23,23, Heb. 5:12 to 6:1, On To Maturity

(Heb. 5:12-14) 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.

So, we'll start with some technical information to make sure we know what the terms mean, then we can make some applications.

We'll begin with what the author to Hebrews wanted all of them to be – “teachers” (didaskalos). Since there's a spiritual gift of teacher, and as we know from 1 Cor. 12, no one has every gift, the author is not expecting all of the Hebrew Christians to have that gift. But didaskalos can also simply mean “instructor”. The Hebrews had been believers long enough that they should have been able to instruct those younger than them in the truths of the scriptures.

But instead, they needed someone to instruct them all over again – they had stagnated to the point that they had lost what they once had.

The word “oracles” is referring to (quote) “any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise - the first principle.”

So, again, the author is stressing the need for his readers to recover what they first learned. They no longer even had the basics down pat; let alone the doctrinal structure that would be built on that foundation.

The word “milk” is a reaffirmation of this. It's a metaphor for the less difficult truths. The word “solid food” is two words; (stereos) which means strong or immovable and (trophe) meaning nourishment.

Milk is a great place to start; we all start there, but if we intend to be strong and immovable in the faith, our intake of truth must be the more advanced truths with certain spiritual characteristics inherent in them.

Then the author says that those who's steady diet is milk are “unskillful in the word of righteousness”. Unskillful is accurate, but the original is broader than that. It

includes the idea of “inexperienced” and “ignorant” in a negative sense, not just in a ‘youthful’ sense.

The outcome of this (assuming the person moves from milk to solid food in the genuine spiritual meaning of those terms) is that he or she is now able to discern good from evil.

The word “good” (kalos) means; “beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable, excellent in its nature and characteristics, genuine, approved.”

Do we really need to be spiritually mature to recognize these things? We do, because the enemy has so perfectly imitated them so as to convince many that they are seeing the reality rather than a near perfect copy.

It would take way too long to break down the meaning of each of those words I gave in the description of “good” in terms of their Greek meanings, but the bottom-line is that each of them is emphasizing the real over the imitation, as in that which has substance versus that which is merely a shadow.

The same is true of the world “evil” which means “that which is bad *by nature*; base, wrong, injurious, destructive, deceitful.”

Satan’s work in this world, and especially in regard to God’s children, is to deceive us into calling good evil and evil good. And we will do this if we live on milk, because without solid food, we won’t be able to recognize, or discern, that which is, *by nature, intrinsically*, good or evil.

Milk holds the saints in a superficial, shadow world of spiritual unreality when, if they had moved to solid food, they would be living in reality, in truth, and would easily recognize that going back to Judaism for the sake of safety, would be a deception.

That’s what the author was telling them in every way he could think of to communicate it.

We obviously face the same dangers. There’s safety in conformity to an elementary level Christianity; there’s safety in being a part of that which is popular and avoiding that which is unpopular. For us, it’s more a matter of peer pressure; for the early church, it was life or death.

Listen to Spurgeon's commentary on this section of Hebrews 5;

A child is a very beautiful object, an infant is one of the loveliest sights under heaven; but if, after twenty years, your child was still an infant, it would be a dreadful trial to you. We must keep on growing till we come to the stature of men in Christ Jesus. The babe is perfect in its measure, but it is not grown up. Those limbs must expand; the little hand must get a wider grasp; the trembling feet must become strong pillars for ripening manhood; the man must swell, and grow, and expand, and enlarge, and be consolidated. Now when we are born to God, we have all the parts of the advanced Christian. Faith, hope, love, patience, —they are all there, but they are all little, all in miniature, and they must all grow; and he is of full age whose faith is vigorous, whose love is inflamed, whose patience is constant, whose hope is bright, who has every grace, in full fashion. The full-grown man is stronger than the babe. His sinews are knit; his bones have become fuller of solid material; they are no longer soft, there is more solid matter in them. So, with the advanced Christian; he is no longer to be bent about and twisted; his bones are as iron, and his muscles as steel; he moves himself in stately paces, neither does he need any upon whom to lean. He can plough the soil, or reap the corn; deeds that were impossible to infancy are simplicities to the full-grown man.

So, spiritual growth is, of course, God's highest priority for His people because He knows that if we grow to full stature spiritually, everything we're supposed to be and do will be a natural outcome of that growth, because Christ will have been formed in us and His life will increasingly be manifest through us.

The Hebrews had closed their ears to this, preferred milk over meat, and as a consequence were not in a place spiritually where they could teach others or even discern good from evil, and truth from error, well enough to protect themselves from being drawn into something far less than what the Lord desired for them.

With the 30,000 foot view, we can see that the enemy's primary goal throughout the centuries was to do all he could to keep God's people in a state of spiritual infancy for the simple reason that he would then be able to manipulate them into either false doctrine, immorality or attachment to the world in some measure.

As long as Christians are moving by the motivations which are drawn from the soul and lack the instruction and revelation that comes from seeing Christ by the Spirit, there will always be limitation and to some degree, the dominion of religious flesh.

I want to briefly look at 2 Tim. 3:8; “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth. . .” Jannes and Jambres were the magicians that battled Moses in Egypt during the Exodus by copying Moses’s miracles.

That section of 2 Tim. is prophesying about the kind of deception what would permeate the Church in the last days.

The character of deception and resistance to God’s testimony in the world in the last days is offered by those who, though they imitate the effects of the truth, have only an outward “a form of godliness” (2 Timothy 3:5). People like this can do the same things, adopt the same forms, use the same theology, phraseology and profess the same convictions as others. If the true Christian feeds the hungry, visits the sick, teaches the scriptures, witnesses to the lost, engages in prayer, sings worship songs, then the imitator will also do these things.

Again, this is the special character of the resistance offered to the truth “in the last days”. This is the spirit and work of 21st century “Jannes and Jambres.” It’s putting the clothing of an external, soul-based Christianity on the Church and convincing her that she is clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

(Rev. 3:17-18) Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire.

The emperor has no clothes.

I’m just concerned that with all of us, the propensity to be hearers and not doers of the Word is extremely dangerous. Hopefully, that will make more sense as we go through what I want to look at.

As we’ve seen in Heb. 5, spiritual discernment is developed by our advance from milk to solid food and through the *exercise* of our spiritual senses (hang on to that word “exercise”; it’s a doer term not a *hearer* term; you can’t exercise by watching videos of other people exercising). And as Paul explained in 1 Cor. 2:12-13;

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man (lit. psychikos or soulish man) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things.

Can we agree that we are on very shaky ground in our interpretation of spiritual reality or deception if we are using our soul to do the interpreting? Listen again to Paul's clear statement about this;

“But the soulish man *does not receive* the things of the Spirit of God . . . *nor can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

There is no way to know whether anything that claims to be of God actually *is* of God except through spiritual discernment – and according to Paul, the soul is completely incapable of that.

The scriptures are the only light we have. There's no light in this world; there's no light in our souls other than what we receive from the Spirit. And we can't *exercise* our spiritual senses without studying and then applying the Word of God to everything around us.

That doesn't happen in a Bible study; it happens in real life *outside* our Bible studies. *Hearing* the Word doesn't train us; the only thing that equips us is *doing* the Word. Our spiritual life and discernment aren't built by academics; they're built by application.

So, what exactly is being soulish as Paul describes it? It's when we look at something and then with our mind, emotions, and five senses (like our eyes and ears) we make a decision. These days, emotion seems to play the biggest role because the enemy has removed commitment to study, research and examine things, and he's replaced that with “how do I feel about this”? But we're told to test everything based on the scriptures (1 Thess. 5:21) and that seems to be the last thing we do rather than the first.

No matter how good or bad something looks to us, we are told to stand back, take a deep breath, and examine everything in the light of the scriptures before making any decision. Something that looks bad could be good, and something that looks good, could be bad. But this isn't a 'do research' generation; it's a decide based on outward appearances generation.

For example – everyone has probably heard of Asbury by now. What did most Christians do with that? Did they research the college? Did they compare what they found with the scriptures to see if this is something God would support? No, they dropped back to doing what the world does – they used their soul to determine reality.

It “seems” good – it “looks” good – it “sounds” good. They used their mind, their five senses and their emotion.

What about The Chosen? Who produces it? What do they believe? Does it match the Bible? It makes me *feel* good about Jesus (emotion); He *seems* down to earth (observances of the five senses); and the show is showing how He *probably* was (the mind or intellect). Emotion, observation, intellect.

But what's the *source* of The Chosen? Mormon? Catholic? I was told that there's an episode with Jesus asking Matthew to help Him write the gospel of Matthew – is that the Jesus you know?

So, again, what are we using to determine what's safe and what isn't? Emotion, intellect, feelings, special effects, profound dialogue, and a down to earth Jesus who “gets us”.

Is that the image you want to be conformed to? Because, the Jesus we behold and gaze upon will be the one formed in us. I want the One who is the Son of God; the majesty, glory and wonder of a Christ beyond comprehension – Who keeps me in awe and worship, and *always* desiring to know more of Him, not one who “gets me”. I want the Jesus of eternity, not the Jesus of T.V.

The soul is the great deceiver. Satan in the garden appealed to Eve's soul: The lust of the flesh (emotion), lust of the eyes (five senses) and the pride of life (the mind gaining knowledge). Satan's appeal has *always been* to the soul.

There has to be a willingness on our part to go Berean in researching below the surface, praying for spiritual wisdom and comparing everything with God's Word. That's the spiritual approach; the only safe approach, if we want to avoid deception.

God is dividing the Church between those willing to do this (called the Remnant) and those who are determined to live by their souls (like the Corinthians, the Hebrews and the Laodiceans). The outcome of this "Day of Visitation" we are moving into, is that the world and carnal Christianity will despise those who are spiritual, and the spiritual will have to live in the same reality and loneliness of abandonment that Jesus, Paul and others did.

The final Church (according to the prophecies of the last days of this Age), will be made up of hundreds of denominations and non-denominations, all of whom will be living from their souls and determining what is of God and what isn't based on whatever their mind, their senses, and their emotions tell them.

The final apostate Church will use acceptance, tolerance, and personal happiness as the criteria of what is good, and they will see the "only one way" attitudes of salvation and spiritual growth as evidence of a narrow, bigoted, legalistic and intolerant mindset.

The Remnant will be the only ones on this planet who are actually speaking the truth in love, because true love is about delivering from darkness, not ignoring or excusing it.

So, what difference does it make if we attend Bible studies, learn how the Lord wants us to live, to examine and to apply - and then leave the study, and as soon as we come across something that we are unsure of as to its spiritual value, we revert back to our soul to try to interpret it?

One of the main things I'm trying to do in our studies is help all of us understand how to spiritually survive in the most dangerous, deception-filled generation in all of human history. That's show the Bible labels this generation.

But nothing I do will matter if people focus on what I teach once a week for an hour or so, and then simply brush it aside when the details of life hit us the other 6 days of the week.

The Bible tells us how to be safe, how to grow, how to make decisions in sync with the mind of Christ, and when we are confronted with opportunities to *practice* these things (to *exercise* our spiritual senses *in real life*) for some, those principles are rarely taken into consideration. It doesn't matter what we know; the only thing that matters what we *do* with what we know.

Admittedly, this is personal and I have to always examine whether what I'm doing in my studying, praying and teaching is really helping people or not.

I realize that having somewhat of a working knowledge of the Bible, academically, is no guarantee that I have accurate discernment.

I'm giving what I get, hoping that what I get, in most cases at least, bypasses my own inadequacies and prejudices. If you decide that any warning I give is unjustified and should be ignored, that's between you and the Lord; you should definitely follow His lead.

But in this Laodicean generation, deception is far more predominant than truth and attempting to protect those I care about from deception is something I'm clearly mandated to do;

(2 Tim. 4:1-4) I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, they will draw to themselves teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear; and they will turn their ears away from the truth.

(Eph. 5:11) Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead, expose them.

Ok, let's get back into Hebrews.

The author to Hebrews is diligently acting in the role of a pastor as Paul describes him. He's covering everything his readers need to see and challenging them on the importance of hearing what he's saying. And in our passage in chapter 5, he's saying, dogmatically, that milk cannot produce maturity and the kind of discernment that protects us from deception.

Now that we know the reasons maturity is so important, we need to see more on how it's achieved. I'm going to begin by sharing a brief excerpt from a writing I found by Sparks entitled "Maturity, the Lord's Desire for His People". Here's how he introduces his article;

The great feature of the dispensation in which we live is the gathering out from the nations of the members of the Body of Christ, and then the bringing of them on to as full a measure of maturity as is possible. It is not only the salvation of souls, and it is not only the collecting of believers into a spiritual Body. It is afterward, their coming to full growth, which represents the supreme interest and concern of the Lord in this dispensation. I think that is perfectly clear as being a great feature of this time; that maturity is the desire of the Lord for His people; full growth, completeness.

It's like I said earlier, 'If we grow to full stature spiritually, everything we're supposed to be and do will be an organic outcome of that growth.' The Lord knows that, as does the enemy, so that is the one area in all of our lives on which both of them are focused – the Lord desires to carry us to maturity; Satan works to prevent it.

The Lord will lead and enable, but we must agree to follow. He's seeking to build spiritual intelligence into us; not through doctrine alone, but through experience; on learning to apply truth to life.

One last comment on this before we move into chapter 6.

In the Old Testament, Christ was the Anointed One; the Messiah of Israel; King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is all they knew. But in the epistles we see this understanding of Christ not only greatly expanded, but we also see in Him something no one had even imagined before; it had never entered the heart of man.

We saw a few weeks ago in our study that all spiritual insight comes by way of revelation – every insight we get that is true, is a miracle.

(Col. 1:25-26) I became its servant by the commission God gave me to fully proclaim to you the word of God, the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed to His saints (brought to the saints by revelation).

Even though we've spent a great deal of time on this, I jotted down a brief one sentence overview of my understanding of this "mystery";

The Church is Christ corporately expressed; it is the new creation humanity that will make up the universal spiritual body of Christ.

For those who see this by a revelation from the Spirit, they know that there is nothing in the Christian life that means anything until this is established in our understanding. Younger believers who are untaught may act out of love and gratitude to the Lord and He will definitely honor their obedience and reward them for it. But without knowing who we are in Christ, the fullness of spiritual life and productivity cannot take place.

It's up to the pastor to make sure his people know that what forms both the foundation and spiritual infrastructure of the Christian life, is the once hidden mystery of the nature of the Christ as being head and body of a new creation that never existed prior to the advent of the Spirit at Pentecost.

I hope you can see now why Paul, Peter and the others seemed so desperate to make Christ known to His people. They had seen that nothing else matters if this is not seen, believed and lived. And they had seen this heavenly vision disregarded, downplayed and even trampled under foot by replacing it with the Christian religion – with a *form* of godliness.

This was the acid test the apostles used to determine the spiritual condition of the 1st. century churches – do the believers know who they are in Christ and are they living out from that reality?

Ok, let's move into Hebrews 6 where the author begins to show us the *consequences of not* making the journey of this transition from infancy to maturity.

(Heb. 6:1-3) Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

Again, we'll need some definitions before we can apply what the author is saying.

Let's start with the word "leaving"; here's what it means:

The verb “Leaving” is in the aorist tense that calls for definite, effective action by the individual. Also, the active voice signifies that this change of direction requires a definite choice of one's will.

In other words, it *must* be done (aorist tense) and *we* are the ones who decide whether or not we will do it (the command is in the active not passive voice). As Kenneth Wuest puts it;

The writer is emphasizing the human side of moving to maturity. Everyone born into the family of God is born with the capacity to progress out of infancy into maturity in Christ. But as he has already alluded to in this letter, the writer of Hebrews recognized that there were those who were in danger of either regressing or remaining indefinitely in infancy by never moving from milk to solid food.

This is one of the reasons I've been so harsh on pastors who give only milk to their congregation and never move into the essential truths of the mystery doctrines of the new dispensation and the ultimate, eternal purpose of the Church in Christ.

As the word “leaving” tells us – it's literally impossible to move to maturity without “leaving” the infancy feeding of milk. Leaving means leaving.

I don't know how many good things these pastors are doing; I only know they are not doing the one thing the Lord wants most.

Which leads us to attempt to identify what it is that we are to deliberately, forcefully, leave.

“Elementary teaching” is compromised of the two Greek words “arche” and “logos”. When we put these words together, we see that the author of Hebrews is saying that all believers must leave behind the elementary and partial, and move toward the mature and complete revelation of Christ.

It's the lack of this happening in the Hebrew congregation, and in contemporary Christian churches, that has resulted in the absence of maturity and discernment we saw in Heb. 5:14.

The next verse in our section is “let us press on to maturity”. Unless we leave the elementary principles of Christ, this can't happen. We've also seen in the past that

the word “press” (phero in the Greek) is actually a passive verb. Here’s the implications of that;

The use of the passive voice emphasizes the exertion of power on the individual from an *outside* source. The passive voice also conveys the thought of the need of the recipient to willingly surrender to this outside influence. The present tense emphasizes the continual need for this activity. Note the writer lumps himself in this group needing to be continually borne along. The idea is "Let us be carried along (by God’s Spirit)."

So, as with all progress in the Christian life, the Lord is more than willing to undertake that ‘project’; but we have to surrender or cooperate with the means God has chosen to do this. We have to surrender to Him (as in Rom. 12:1), and we have to move from milk to solid food in our study and understanding of God’s Word. This is what leads to the goal of everything the author of Hebrews is wanting his readers to achieve.

So, our final definition is of “maturity”. We’ve already looked at this earlier, but that was more along the lines of application or description – this will be a word definition;

Teleios from telos = an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal describes one as being in a state of completion of maturity (and in contrast to the stage of elementary knowledge). The word teleios means complete, fully developed, full grown, nothing necessary to completeness, in good working order.

That’s the one goal of the Christian life – spiritual maturity; being complete in terms of growth and stature. And to risk being repetitious, this will never happen unless the believer is deliberately moving from that which is elementary to that which is a fuller and deeper knowledge of the scriptures.

So, unless the pulpit ministry of any given assembly is providing this, stagnation, spiritual infancy and growing deception will be the world they live in. That is simply what our passage in Hebrews is teaching them - and teaching us.

As we’re going to see, it’s not only an instruction; it’s a warning. There are consequences if we decide this is not necessary; that this warning seems too “black and white” and that we need to allow some gray area that would permit *not* leaving the elementary principles of Christ.

So, we'll have to wait till next week to see the specifics of how the Lord views this, when we look at the warning He gives to the Hebrew Church regarding the *consequences* of setting the Lord's warning aside in favor of embracing that which is more comfortable and popular.

To close up, I want to make some personal applications of what we see in Heb. 5 and then share something I found on this part of Hebrews that will help sum up what we've seen tonight.

Even though most of the churches in our cities do not have teaching ministries that provide for spiritual advance, many in our fellowship and Zoom network are involved in churches that have worship, that support missions and other programs.

We want to offer what the Lord has given us through our own experiences to those we have developed relationships with; and we want to receive from *other* believers what the Lord has given *them*.

Even if the majority in these churches fit the prophetic warning of those who "will not endure sound doctrine", in nearly every evangelical church in our nation, there are people who greatly desire "sound doctrine" and for whom the Lord has faithfully provided a means through books, podcasts, etc. to be able to find what they need.

All of this, for us and others, is simply the reality of Christianity in our generation, and in many ways, it's always been like this, as we can see from the letters written to churches and pastors 2000 years ago. There has always been a majority who have settled for less than what God desires for us; and there has always been a remnant who are determined to go as far as the Lord is willing to take them.

As C.A. Coates put it, as if speaking to the majority,

Your despondence as to the Lord's chief interest is only a reflection of your own spiritual condition.

Now, here's what I wanted to share to close.

John Angell James, in his book *Christian Progress*, has a chapter entitled *Motives to Christian Progress* and these are his "bullet points" from that chapter. And keep in mind that he's old school in his language and approach, but if we understand what

he's saying, we can see that the content of his writing definitely matches what we have been studying in Heb. 5.

1. The first motive to Christian progress is the danger of deception.
2. It should be most impressively felt that spiritual progress is commanded and expected by God.
3. Christian progress is a bright evidence of sincerity; growth is the proof of life.
4. Christian progress is its own reward (and he adds; viewed in its true nature, it unites the highest dignity with the purest pleasure and the ways of honor. Can anything be loftier, nobler, more sublime, than a growing conformity to the image of God?
5. And is it not a powerful motive to grow in grace to consider that our present attainments in true Christianity, have a connection with, and will have an influence upon, our heavenly and eternal state.

After reading these pages, are you at all excited to desire to spiritually advance? Does the fire kindle, does the glow diffuse throughout your soul at the idea of what is here presented? If not, let me try again, not by new motives—but by recalling those which are here enumerated.

Does not the dread of deception, backsliding, apostasy, terrify you?

Shall not the command of God impel you?

Will not the hope of gaining a sweet and blessed evidence of advance, lead you to seek after progress?

Does not the experience you have already had, though it may be in a small degree, of the reward which advancement yields—induce you to go forward?

And then what shall be said of the fact that our degrees of growth will regulate our degrees of glory? Has this no motive for you? Are you so insensible to the honors and distinctions of heaven as to feel no holy ambition to have some place of honor there?

No, we aren't that insensible, and we're going for it.