

The Crushing Weight of Immaturity

Hebrews 5:11-14

October 22, 2023

INTRO ...It is not a coincidence that this Great Dechurching shift coincides with the most busy, hectic paced lifestyles of Americans EVER—and the reinvention of Christian Discipleship to be something quick, convenient, and not demanding!

Heb 5:11 – 14 *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.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,¹³ 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.*

Difficulty that Yields Distance & Dullness

We've Already Met One Problem amongst these Hebrew Christians—**they're living in a "Life-Crisis-Moment" that threatens to Undermine Their Faith, to Weaken their Perseverance, and to Invigorate Drift & Distance!** ...Here, we meet "OTHER CONTRIBUTING FACTORS"

— Their Season of Difficulty served as a "De-Motivator" that was now threatening to "Suffocate Their Faith"! ...Their "Drift & Distance" was now turning into "DULLNESS"

"The writer of Hebrews hasn't come right out and said it until now. But he has implied it. There is something wrong with the Christians he is writing to.

In 2:1 he said, Pay close attention to the message you've heard lest you drift away. ...In 3:12 he said, Take care, lest you have an evil heart of unbelief. ...And in 4:14 he said, Hold fast to your confession.

In all of these urgent admonitions you begin to get the impression: this writer is really concerned about some situation in the churches of his day. But until now he has only given the cure, not the diagnosis. Now he tells us what's wrong. ..."Dullness of hearing" is hearing without faith and without the moral fruit of faith. It's hearing the Bible or the preaching of the Bible the way you hear the freeway noise on I-94, or the way you hear Muzak in the dentist's office or the way you hear recorded warnings at the airport that this is a smoke-free facility. You do but you don't. You have grown dull to the sound. It does not awaken or produce anything." **John Piper**

...NOTE: Their Current Malaise is NOT merely the result of their "Life-Crisis" ...It has been added to By Their DULLNESS and by Their IMMATURITY!

"Literally, the phrase reads, "you have become sluggish in the ears." Therefore we understand that their problem was an acquired condition characterized by an inability to listen to spiritual truth. They were not naturally "slow," they were not intellectually deficient, but they had become spiritually lazy. They listened with the attentiveness of a slug. They had become unreceptive and closed." **Kent Hughes**, Hebrews Vol 1., PTWC

"Instead of giving their best mind to sound doctrine and its practical application, many of these early Christian readers have become dull of hearing. The word really means 'sluggish'; it is used in the Septuagint of 'slothful men' who refuse to tackle hard work" **Raymond Brown**, The Message of Hebrews, BST

... Our "Life-Crisis-Moments" will come! ... In these Moments we need to Spiritually Breathe! ...Keep Growing, Learning, Worshipping ...Draw Near!! ...and Don't Be Sluggish/LAZY about it!

V. 11... The described dilemma of Teaching that Won't Stick! ...there is "much to say" that is not even going to get presented!

... "about this ...we have much to say" ...About what?

"At the end of 5:10 he has stated that the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus is 'after the order of Melchizedek'. His reference to this Old Testament character leads him to reflect on this congregation's inability to benefit by the 'solid food' of deep Christian teaching." **Raymond Brown**, *The Message of Hebrews*, BST

...In this passage the KEY to their Persevering in their Moment-of-Crisis is their DEPTH—their "Maturity"!

V. 11 ... Something of God's revelation is described as "**hard to explain**"—but the reason isn't located in the headiness of the content or in the complexity of the communicator, but rather in a Pervasive Immaturity!

"the writer of Hebrews began his extensive instruction on the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, beginning in chapter 5. No sooner does he begin to explain this, however, than he realizes that he has a pedagogical problem on his hands. ...—"and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." That being the case, our writer turns aside to deal with the matter of his readers' immaturity and lack of spiritual commitment. Until he has corrected this, there is no point proceeding into deeper matters of the faith." **Richard Phillips**, *Hebrews, Reformed Expository Commentary*

...These Christians are "DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED"! ...Their Spiritual Condition COULD Be and SHOULD Be Different!!

V. 12 ... "by this time you ought to be..."

...these 7 words are incredibly informative for the rest of the church's discipleship age! ...Revelation communicated and revelation received is dipped in EXPECTATION!

"By this TIME" ...There is a "Time Factor" in our Spiritual Development!

"You OUGHT to be" ...There is Expectation & Anticipation in Spiritual growth!

— This is not the first time the N.T. Points out the normalcy of Discipleship Growth and the surprise when it doesn't occur

1 Cor 3:1-4 *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?*

...There is Essential Expectation in these verses and in the Apostles!!

- **There is the expectation that jealousy & strife would be decreasing and not dominating people!**

"...the writers of the N.T. had a deep-seated concern to see Christians grow to spiritual maturity. Paul tells us that this was a central goal in his ministry: he worked hard to 'present everyone mature in Christ' (Col 1:28-29). ...But it is easy to neglect our calling to grow up to be mature Christians. ...It requires time and patient progress. ...It is developed only in the school of discipleship... The word 'mature' (teleios) belongs to a family of words in the N.T. which convey the idea of wholeness. ...The word had other uses. It meant to reach a high level of competence—as a doctor, or teacher, or even as a thief! ...stable, capable Christians whose gifts and graces have been developed; those who by God's grace have become masters of themselves, and are able to use all the gifts that God has given them in his service. The mature Christian has been finely shaped by the Holy Spirit and has been 'filled out' in character which shows the fruit of the Spirit." **Sinclair Ferguson**, "Maturity", p. 5-7

- **There is the expectation that division & competition would not be able to thrive in a setting that features Humility that is informed by the Righteousness & Grace of God!!**

...Paul had previously described what the contributing factors were to the Corinthian Immaturity:

1 Cor 2:6-10 *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.*

V. 13 ... "Everyone who lives on milk" ...NOTE: (1) a Milk Diet is Appropriate at Some point (2)...It is possible to develop a brand of discipleship that lives only on milk!

"This is one of the passages that indicates that the readers of this epistle were not recent converts or new believers. "By this time you ought to be teachers," he says. He does not mean by this that they should all be ordained ministers, but that they ought to be able to instruct others in the faith, whereas in fact they haven't yet grasped the most elementary truths of God's Word.

The recipients of this letter were like many Christians today who think that theology is a waste of time. What difference does it make, people ask, whether God is a Trinity or not, whether Christ's righteousness comes by imputation or by infusion, and whether regeneration comes before faith or after? What is important, they say, is that we get along with each other. Then they cite passages commending a childlike faith, as if that were the same as a childish faith, that is, one that is indifferent to or ignorant of the Word of God.

This attitude is so prevalent today that perhaps the majority of professing believers try to nourish themselves on the weak diet of milk alone. Not that there is anything wrong with milk. It is just that those who are no longer babies require a stronger diet if they are to grow. Yet we are living in a time when most church members are immensely ignorant of the Bible and its doctrines." **Richard Phillips**, Hebrews, REC

V. 14 ...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.

- **"solid food"**
- **"training"**

But what is most serious about their spiritual ignorance is that, being unfamiliar with God's word, they do not know his mind on important doctrinal, ethical and spiritual issues. His truth is a word of righteousness and those who master its message learn how to distinguish good from evil. This does not come to anybody without effort. These spiritual faculties have to be trained (gegymnasmena) as in a gymnasium, an idea that returns later in the epistle (12:11), also in the context of discipline.

These Jewish Christians had certainly not intended to get into this indolent, useless state, but this is clearly what has happened to them." **Raymond Brown**, The Message of Hebrews, BST

- **"constant practice to distinguish good from evil" ...an approach to protecting our discernment & worldview—Needed Now More than Ever!!**
 - **You are Inundated with Messages, Arguments, Philosophies, and Pathways of Rewards!! ...This passage teaches the necessity to be CONSTANT in FILTERING! ...Always discerning Good from Evil!**

...These Hebrew Christians— Their “Life-Crisis-Moment” Needed to Encounter a MATURE Disciple!—Instead it encountered Immature Ones!

Does it matter whether or not you become mature in the faith? Yes! Immature believers are easily led astray, which has been the writer’s concern all through this epistle. In Ephesians 4:14 the apostle Paul expresses a similar concern for that church, where spiritual infants are “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” Those who do not progress in the truths of the faith are tossed back and forth, particularly when faced with deceivers and their false schemes, as we always will be.” **Richard Phillips**, Hebrews, REC

“The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind. . . . Unlike their spiritual ancestors, modern evangelicals have not pursued comprehensive thinking under God or sought a mind shaped to its furthest reaches by Christian perspective.” **Mark Noll**, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*

...It is the Maturity of Your Faith that may protect you from Abandoning Your Faith!

This morning is about Examining Your Approach to a Discipleship that Produces Maturity

Personal Study!! ...Discipleship University! ...Small Group Ministry!