

“Don’t Be a Baby!”

Heb. 5:11-14

- INTRO. - We all know that it is cute (and funny) when a baby acts like a baby – but when an adult acts like a baby – it is *not* funny at all! We expect adults to be mature – and that applies in the *spiritual* realm, as well as the *physical*.
- We also know that it is a great tragedy when an infant does *not* grow and develop as he/she should. Any form of retardation (or arrested development) is a sad reality.
- We expect our children to grow up in every way into adults – and that is also true in the spiritual realm. It is a great tragedy when believers do *not* grow into spiritual maturity. And (of course) it is an even *greater* tragedy if one is *not* born again to *begin* with.
- Now, what we have (in our passage this morning) is the beginning of another exhortation from the author of Hebrews to his audience. Remember, this is a sermon, and in this sermon we see a number of times where the preacher breaks from his exposition and moves into exhortation.
- In fact, this exhortation (that we see beginning today) goes all the way to 6:12. It is made up of four distinct paragraphs (so I think I’ll do a message on each one).
- The entire exhortation is bracketed by the Greek word “nothros” (which means dull or sluggish). This is a rhetorical device known as an “inclusion.” It’s like having a bookend at the front and the back. The first bookend is, “you have become dull” (in 5:11) and the second one is, “that you may not be sluggish” (in 6:12).
- This first paragraph is our text today – 5:11-14. And notice – this exhortation is a break from his discussion of Melchizedek. He is going to come back to that topic in chapter 7, but the purpose for this “digression” is to prepare his audience for that deeper discussion through reproof, warning, and encouragement.
- By the use of the “dullness motif” he is grabbing their attention, and challenging their insensitivity to the truth he wants to present. In fact, this exhortation is going to include a blistering warning, as well as a strong encouragement.
- Now, let me start by saying that this is an extremely difficult passage. This is a section that has produced a wide variety of interpretations (even among conservative Evangelical scholars).
- Most agree that it deals primarily with spiritual maturity, but there is some disagreement as to who the target is. Are these believers or unbelievers he is addressing? The traditional view is that they are

believers, but John MacArthur has challenged that view.

- Now, I have said (from the beginning of this study) that I believe there is a mixed audience being addressed here – so part of this may apply to unbelievers and some of it may apply to believers.
- The unbelievers (that are being addressed) are those who have been around the church and know the gospel. The problem is, that they have fallen short of making a firm commitment to Christ.
- The believers (being addressed) seem to be those who are struggling, and have *not* grown to spiritual maturity, and may be in danger of returning to Judaism. Perhaps persecution is causing them to waver in their faith.
- So (as we go through this) I will try to apply this message to both groups, but it seems as if the first and last paragraphs tend toward applying to believers, while the middle part is more targeted to unbelievers.
- But one thing we always need to keep in mind is the over-arching purpose for which a book was written. The Book of Hebrews is essentially a comparison of Judaism and Christianity.
- The central theme of Hebrews appears to be the superiority of the New Covenant to that of the Old

Covenant. In other words, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

- The sub-themes (under that) are things like the superiority of the new priesthood over the old, the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ over the daily sacrifices, the superiority of the new Mediator to that of the old, etc.
- John MacArthur says, “This is the key that unlocks every section of Hebrews, and to use any other key...is to make forced entry.” This is why he sees the first three paragraphs of this exhortation as being directed to unbelievers.
- He writes, “In the book of Hebrews the Holy Spirit is *not* contrasting two kinds of Christianity. He is *not* contrasting immature Christians and mature ones. He is contrasting Judaism and Christianity, the unsaved Jew in Judaism and the redeemed Jew in Christianity. He is contrasting the substance and the shadow, the pattern and the reality, the visible and the invisible, the facsimile and the real thing, the type and the anti-type, the picture and the actual.”
- He says, “The Old Testament essentially is God’s revelation of pictures and types, which are fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament.” Of course, I totally agree with all that, so it makes sense that (in light of this) the exhortation is addressed to (either) unbelieving Jews who have *not* yet made a firm

commitment to Christ or believers who have *not* grown in the faith past spiritual infancy.

- In either case they are in danger of abandoning the church and returning to Judaism. And (by the way) John MacArthur also acknowledges this dual audience, but perhaps an illustration would be helpful at this point.
- ILL. – One pastor tells about going into a video store and noticing a video of the movie *Pinnocchio*. He said that it was a 3-D cover, so when he first looked at it, there was a picture of a wooden marionette held by its master, but when he got to a different angle it changed to a human boy with no strings attached.
- Sometimes what we need to do, is to look at things from more than one angle. Sometimes a given passage may have more than one application. There is no doubt the over-all concern of the author of Hebrews is the spiritual condition of his hearers. Ultimately (we can safely say) he wants them *all* to be mature believers.
- So (with that in mind) let's move into this first paragraph of this exhortation. This first paragraph falls into three divisions, and the first one we see is:

I. THE CAUSE (v. 11)

- Look with me at v. 11, “Concerning him [Melchizedek] we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” The author of Hebrews wants to go into some deeper truths related to Melchizedek and the superiority of Christ, but he can't do that yet.
- He will do that (beginning in chapter 7) but he has to confront their dullness first. They can't possibly understand the significance of Jesus' priesthood being like Melchizedek in their present state of dullness.
- Notice, the reason these things are “hard to explain” is *not* because he does *not* have the verbal ability to do so – it is because they “have become dull of hearing.”
- The problem is *not* in the *delivery* of the message – it is in the *reception* of it. By the way, some have said this means “hard to interpret,” but that's *not* what it means. It means “difficult to explain.”
- This word was used for things that are hard to comprehend (like dreams, the creation of the world, or the resurrection). And in this case, the reason *why* it was hard to explain was the dullness of the hearers' spiritual perception.
- The word for “dull” (there) is the Greek word “nothros.” It means “sluggish, lazy, or negligent.” In fact, it usually includes the idea of *culpable*

negligence. It points to a reluctance to listen. Their problem is *not* just mental laziness, but also spiritual resistance.

- It *can* mean “dimwitted.” Plato even used this word to refer to stupid (and stubborn) students. George Guthrie says, “It was used in extrabiblical literature...of a slave with ears ‘stopped up’ by laziness, who was thus *not* obedient instantly to the call of his master.”
- In the realms of athletics, it was used of a competitor who was out of shape, lazy, or sluggish. It is sometimes used to refer to something that is hard to push. (In fact, the word “nothros” is a compound word that comes from two words, “no” and “push.”) It can *even* refer to someone who has gone into a coma.
- And notice that the author of Hebrews says they have *become* dull of hearing. The word for “become” is the Greek word “ginomai.” The way it is used *here* implies that there was a time when they were much more open to the message than they are now.
- Perhaps at one point they were interested in the message – even excited about it – but now that has changed. They didn’t start off “dull,” but they have become that way gradually. They are *now* in a spiritual stupor.

- The implication is, that they have failed to take advantage of the truth they have heard, and now they have become numb to it. If this is being addressed to unbelievers, it means that they have said “no” to the gospel and now they are becoming hardened to it.
- If this is addressed to believers who are in danger of returning to Judaism, he is saying they have rejected the Word of God and have *not* grown in their faith as they should have.
- Either way, he is trying to awaken them from their spiritual dullness. This is very similar to what he had said earlier (in 2:1), “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away *from it*.”
- Now, we also need to understand that the author of this book believes they will respond positively to this warning, and that their dullness is *not* permanent – because beginning in 6:9 he says he has confidence in them.
- In other words, if you recognize spiritual dullness, you can turn from it and come back to spiritual alertness – and ultimately to spiritual maturity.
- If you are *not* truly born again, you can come to faith in Christ – and ultimately to spiritual maturity. But the point is, you can do something about it. You can repent and go the other direction.

- That is the hope of this preacher, but notice (secondly) that he describes:

II. THE CONDITION (vv. 12-13)

- In vv. 12-13 he uses an analogy to describe their present condition. This expands what it means to be “dull of hearing.”
- Look at it with me, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” (Stop right there for a moment.)
- They are (at best) spiritual babies. They can’t eat solid food. All they can handle is milk. Of course, we *get* this analogy. You don’t bring your newborn baby home from the hospital and put a big T-Bone steak in front of him. He’s *not* ready for that. He can’t handle that. What he needs is milk.
- He needs a bottle – and that is *fine* for a baby to have a bottle. But when he gets to adult age, if he *still* has a bottle – that’s a problem! There’s a big difference between being *childlike* and being *childish*. The Bible commends being *childlike*, but it condemns remaining *childish*.

- Someone has written, “We can excuse babies for all the childish things they do, but a *big* baby is next to impossible to live with.”
- So in essence, the message here is, “Grow up! Don’t be a baby! You should be past that.” Of course, if this is being addressed to unbelievers here, they *can’t* grow up until they first have spiritual life. So they need to become spiritually regenerated so they can begin to grow in Christ.
- If this is being addressed to young believers, then they need to progress past spiritual infancy and on to spiritual maturity. Either way, they need to get *out of* their present condition.
- Notice he says, “...though by this time you ought to be teachers...” They had been under the teaching of the truth for long enough for them to be the teachers themselves. They clearly knew the gospel.
- But they (either) never committed themselves to it, or they never grew much past that initial commitment to Christ. They were still babies.
- Listen my friend, years alone do *not* make you mature. There’s more to it than that. In the spiritual realm it requires a deep devotion to Christ and a diligent learning of His truth.

- But these Hebrews had *not* attained that. Rather than being teachers, they needed someone else to teach them – and they needed someone to teach them the “elementary principles.”
- *That* is a word that means “the ABCs.” The Greek word “stoicheia” means “that which comes first.” The KJV even uses the word “first.” The Greek text includes this word “arche.” It means the most rudimentary element. In reference to language, this would be the letters of the alphabet.
- And notice the word “again.” This means that they had (at one time) heard these truths. The assumption (here) is that they had all been exposed to this instruction, but they needed to go back and learn it again.
- They needed to go back to Kindergarten. They needed to go back to the very *basics* of biblical truth. He says, “the elementary principles of the oracles of God.”
- Now, a lot of people think that is a reference to the NT (or the gospel) but that is probably a reference to the OT. But now (having said that) it *may* refer to the teaching of the OT concerning Christ. It may be a reference to the “gospel” in the OT. Remember now, the NT had *not* been canonized at this time.
- Peter O’Brien writes, “...here in Hebrews the expression probably means the Scriptures interpreted in the light of the death and exaltation of Jesus. This sense is consistent with the way our author has been interpreting the Old Testament in Hebrews itself.”
- In other words, they need to go back and grasp the significance of passage like Psalm 2 and Psalm 95 and Psalm 110. These are the passages the author of Hebrews has used to present the “gospel” and the truth concerning Christ.
- If they could *not* grasp (and embrace) the truth of the gospel (the ABCs), how could they handle the meat of theological truth concerning Melchizedek?
- He says, “You are still unable to digest anything stronger than milk, the diet of infants.” The last part of v. 12 says, “...you have come to need milk and not solid food.”
- Now, it is also possible (here) that the author of Hebrews has in mind the OT as a whole. There is a sense in which the old covenant was the spiritual alphabet.
- John MacArthur says, “The Old Covenant was the baby talk, the letters and the sounds of a child’s first vocabulary. It is like a picture book in comparison to the theology of the NT.”

- When you begin to teach your children, you don't begin with an Encyclopedia. You start with a picture book. You point to the picture and say, "This is a cow. What sound does a cow make?"
- You have to start with the rudimentary things and work your way up. They don't just start off reading. And in the same way, God's revelation to man has progressed in a similar fashion.
- The NT is the final and complete revelation, but the OT is like the picture book. It gives the foundational, elementary teaching. It begins with pictures. There is the picture of the blood sacrifice. There is the picture of the various feasts. There is the picture of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.
- But all those pictures were designed to point to the final revelation of God to man in Christ Jesus. What you have in the OT is a collection of symbols and shadows. You have pictures that point to the new covenant.
- But the message of Hebrews is, "The New Covenant has come, so we don't need the pictures anymore. We can read now, so we don't need to go back to the picture book."
- However, what he may be saying (here in 5:12) is, "Maybe you *do* need to go back to the picture book. Maybe you're *not* ready for the final revelation. Maybe you're *not* ready for NT meat."
- And perhaps it was because they did *not* even have a firm grasp of OT revelation. Maybe they didn't even understand what the OT had to say about Melchizedek, so they (for sure) would *not* be ready for how his priesthood connected with the New Covenant reality in Christ.
- But go back to v. 12 and notice how that last part is worded. It says, "you have come to need milk and not solid food." A baby does *not* come to need milk. A baby is *born* with that need. The only person that comes to need milk is someone who has reverted back into infancy.
- In other words, this indicates that these Jews were becoming *less* mature instead of *more* mature. They were going backwards. In fact, they had slipped all the way to spiritual infancy.
- Now, this implies a very important spiritual principle: If you don't *progress* you will *regress*. If you are *not* moving *forward*, you *will* move *backwards*.
- Now, this applies to unbelievers. When you first hear the gospel, if you don't respond to it with saving faith, you become a little bit hardened to it. If you continue to reject it over and over again, you will eventually become completely hardened to it.

- This principle also applies to believers. If you are *not* advancing in your walk with Christ, you will be regressing. It's like riding a bike. If you don't keep peddling, you will fall over.
- If you don't progress to a diet of meat, you will have to settle for milk. If you don't heed the Word of God, you will become dull of hearing, and you will *not* become mature in the faith.
- Go on to v. 13, "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." If you stay at the milk level – if you remain a baby – you will *not* learn to handle the "word of righteousness."
- *That* is probably a reference to the NT. It likely has to do with the message of the gospel. Scholars have debated this, but it is likely in contrast to "the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (in v. 12).
- *That* is a reference to the OT (as we have seen). So (in contrast to that) I believe this is referring to the advanced theology of the NT. It likely has to do with the teaching of the NT in regard to the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us through saving faith.
- It also broadens out to include the entire teaching of the NT – that full and final revelation of God to men. It is the advanced theological instruction that enables the believer to become fully mature in the faith.
- The word for "not accustomed" (in the NASB) is probably better translated "unskilled." The one who stays at the milk level is one who will *not* have any ability to understand (and apply) the truth of the NT.
- If you're still at the "ABC level" you're *not* going to be able to read and understand the truth of the New Covenant. Of course, if you are *not* born again, you will *never* be able to understand it.
- Paul said, (in 1 Cor. 2:14) "...a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."
- So, if that is you this morning, then *that* is where you must start. You need to become a spiritual man. You need to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. You need to become spiritually regenerated through saving faith.
- Unless you are born again, you will never be able to go beyond the very basic level of understanding spiritual truth. You won't be able to really understand the truth of Scripture.
- And if you are (in fact) a born-again believer, the question becomes, "Have you grown past the milk

and on to the meat? Have you grown on to spiritual maturity?”

- Well, there is one last thing we see in this passage of Scripture. *Not only* do we see the *cause* and the *condition*, but thirdly we see:

III. THE CONTRAST (v. 14)

- Look with me at v. 14, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”
 - In contrast to the baby, this is a picture of one who is mature. Because of his solid, healthy diet he has become someone who knows how to “discern.”
 - You know, a baby is *not* a good discerner. A baby will put just about *anything* in his mouth. He has no idea what is good and what is bad.
 - But (in contrast to that) someone who is “mature” is one who has a consistent diet of solid, healthy food. He doesn’t put “any old thing” in his mouth.
 - By the way, how this applies (spiritually) is that those who just read any old thing or embrace any wind of doctrine that blows down the road are either *not* really born again, or (at best) are still immature in the faith.
- They’re still babies. They have no skill in the meat of the Word – and they are very vulnerable to false teaching. An infant is someone who cannot feed himself. He does *not* know the difference between good food and poison. He will take anything he can get. All he knows is that he is hungry, so he’ll just poke down what he finds.
 - He needs someone to guide him to wholesome nutrition so he can grow. In the same way a baby has to have someone to protect him from harm, so a “baby Christian” needs those who are more mature in the faith to help him be discerning.
 - And notice the last part of v. 14, “...who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” The word for “practice” (there in the NASB) is the Greek word “hexis,” and it means doing something over and over again. This implies a long pattern of repetition.
 - And the word for “trained” is the word “gumnazo” (from where we get our English word gymnasium). I don’t know about you, but I try to go to the gymnasium a couple of times a week whether I need it or *not*.
 - No, I *do* need it – but more importantly I need it in the spiritual realm. “For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.” (That’s 1 Tim. 4:8.)

- As much as we need *physical* exercise, even more do we need *spiritual* exercise. We *must* move past the milk and on to the meat. God wants us to be mature in the faith. He wants us to be discerning. He wants us to have our senses fully trained to know the difference between good and evil.
- Now, there are many applications for this message today. There are many modern counterparts to the dull hearers mentioned here. There are those who have been around the church for a long time, and have heard the gospel over and over again, but have never professed faith in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation.
- And the truth of the matter is, the more they hear it without embracing it, the more sluggish they will become, and the more hardened to it they will get.
- Then there are those who *are* born again, but they have never grown past the milk stage in their spiritual maturity. They need to grow in their knowledge of the Word. They need to go on to the meat. They need to go on to maturity in Christ.
- What's the message? God doesn't want you to stay in a state of spiritual infancy. He does *not* want you to remain a baby. Grow up and be all God wants you to be.
- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER