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**Christ is Superior to Aaron**  
**(Part 3)**  
*“The Warning against Dullness toward God’s Word”*  
**(Part 1)**  
**Hebrews 5:11-14**

**Introduction:**

TV mogul **Ted Turner** once told a roomful of television executives to **raise the standards** for on-air programming. He said, “People are beginning to **realize** the **total effect** of watching so much stupid, sleazy, lousy, violent, ex-ploi-tive television.” However, later he **conceded** a **level** of **apathy** on his part saying, “My networks run a lot of programming that I’m not happy with. And that bothers me. But does it **bother me enough** to **do something** about it? **No, not really.**”

**Apathy** is a **lack of interest in** or **concern for** things that should matter. It is to be **unfeeling, indifferent, unresponsive** and **complacent**. Whereas **Turner’s** attitude of **apathy**—“it doesn’t **bother me enough** to **do something** about it,” is a **prevalent attitude** in our **culture**, sad to say, this **same attitude** is often **prevalent** in the **church today**. One of the **greatest foes** of the Christian is **spiritual apathy**. **A.W. Tozer** was correct when he said, “Orthodox Christianity has **fallen** to its **present low estate** from **lack of spiritual desire**. Among the many who **profess** the Christian faith, **scarcely** one in a thousand **reveals** any **passionate thirst** for God.” The **problem** of **spiritual apathy** is one of the things that we will be looking at this morning.

Now having just talked about the **royal priesthood** of Jesus Christ “according to the **order** of **Melchizedek**” in **5:6** and **10**, the author of

Hebrews **postpones** his discussion of this important topic until **chapter 7** because there is a **major issue** he must **first** address with his readers. As we now come to **5:11-6:12** in our study of the **Epistle of Hebrew**, the author gives the **third of five warning passages** in this letter. This is one of the **most severe warnings** in the New Testament directed against God's people. Turn in your Bible to **Hebrews 5**, where we will **begin** by looking at **vv. 11-14**.

**In Hebrews 5:11-14 we see three aspects of spiritual immaturity, whereby the author rebukes God's people to motivate them to wholehearted obedience to Jesus Christ.**

The ***first aspect*** is:

### **I. The Condition of Spiritual Immaturity**

A. Look at **v. 11**: Concerning **him** we have **much to say**, and it is **hard to explain**, since you have **become dull of hearing**.

1. The word "**him**" here refers to "**Melchizedek**," who we saw last time **foreshadows** the **royal priesthood** of Jesus Christ. The author says that he has "**much to say**" about this topic to these Jewish Christians, whose **primary knowledge of priesthood** was **restricted** to **Aaron** and the **Levitical priesthood**.
2. However, to do so **at this time** would be "**hard to explain**," not because this topic is difficult to comprehend or the author can't explain it, but because the readers **spiritual condition** hinders them from **receiving** and **grasping** the meaning. Notice that the author tells them, "...you have become **dull of hearing**."

3. The word “**dull**” means **slow, sluggish, lazy, lethargic** and **apathetic**. It speaks of a **spiritual apathy** that is **hindering** their spiritual development.
4. But this wasn’t their **original condition**; it is an **acquired one**, for the author says, “...you have **become** dull in hearing.” In other words, their **original eagerness to hear** and **respond** to the Word of God has **changed**.
5. They have **regressed** so that they are **no longer “ready listeners”** with the **capacity to receive** and **retain** spiritual truth. Now they are **spiritually “dull,” lazy** and **apathetic in their hearing**.
6. **Other interests** and **prioritizes** have **captured** their hearts and are now **controlling** their lives. However, since **responsible listening** has been **stressed repeatedly** in this letter (2:1; 3:7b-8a, 15; 4:1-2, 7b), **dullness in receptivity** is a very **dangerous condition** for believers who have been **called to wholehearted obedience** to Jesus Christ.
7. Whereas the author’s **first two warnings** addressed the **dangers of drifting** from God’s Word and **doubting** God’s Word, this **third warning** addresses the **danger of dullness** towards God’s Word.
8. Now some scholars believe **vv. 11-14** is **primarily** addressed to **unbelievers** in the church and **secondarily** to **believers**. However, because of the **way** the author addresses his readers I agree with those scholars who believe this is **primarily** addressed to **believers**. Obviously, the Holy Spirit **applies** the **truth** of God’s Word to **everyone**, so “if the shoe fits, wear it.”

9. Therefore, in this verse we see that “**dullness** in hearing” or **spiritual apathy** is a **key mark** of these Jewish Christians **regression** to **spiritual immaturity**. In a very real way, they have the **same heart issue** as those in the **church at Ephesus** to whom the glorified Christ said in **Revelation 2:4**, “you have **left your first love.**”
  10. And as those in the **church at Laodicea** to whom He said in **3:16**, “...because you are **lukewarm**, and neither **hot** nor **cold**, I will **spit** you out of my mouth.”
- B. Because of their **sinful condition**, the author goes on to give them a **strong rebuke** in v. **12**: 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**.
1. Because of the **considerable length of time** that has **elapsed** since their **conversion**, probably **several years**, they should have been **spiritually mature** enough to be “**teachers**” themselves. This **doesn't mean** that they all should have the **gift of teaching** or all be in **official teaching positions** in the church
  2. It means that they should have **progressed** in their Christian faith enough to be able to **instruct others** about what God has done in their lives. In **1 Peter 3:15** we read, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being **ready** to **make a defense** to everyone who asks you to **give an account** for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

3. A **mark of spiritual growth** is the **ability to share** biblical truth with others. But even though they had been Christians a **long time**, they weren't **interested** in helping others.
  4. Notice that they had **backslidden so far** that the author says, "...you have **need again** for **someone to teach you** the **elementary principles of the oracles of God.**"
  5. Now the "**elementary principles of the oracles of God**" is probably equivalent to the "**elementary teaching about the Christ**" in **6:1**. Although some scholars say the "**oracles of God**" refer to the **gospel** or the **Old Testament Scriptures**, **Leon Morris** states, "Since the expression is quite **general**, it seems better to take it of **all** that God has spoken—i.e., the **divine revelation in general.**" (Expositors p. 52).
  6. Therefore, the "**elementary principles**" of God's word are the **first and simplest principles**, the **alphabet or ABC's** of divine revelation. So after **years of claiming** to be **followers** of Christ, to their **shame**, the **extent** of their **spiritual comprehension** was at the **lowest level**.
  7. They have relapsed so far back in their Christian life that they are **spiritually unable to read or write**, but have to **start** at the very beginning with the **ABC's** of God's Word. And **even that** is said to be in "**need again**" of **review**.
  8. What a **stinging rebuke!** But the author doesn't **stop** there!
- C. Look at the **second part** of **v. 12**: and **you have come to need milk** and not **solid food**.
1. Just as they have "**become dull in hearing,**" so also they have "**come to need milk** and not **solid food.**" Again we are told

that they have **moved** so far **backwards** from where they used to be that they “**need milk.**”

2. “**Milk**” refers to the simple, elementary **ABC’s** of the Christian faith. And “**solid food**” refers to the **meat** of God’s Word, the more **complex** and **advanced** instruction that **new believers** cannot handle but is **invaluable** to those who have **progressed** in their faith.
3. In this **context**, the “**solid food**” is the **significance** of Christ’s **royal priesthood** “according to the **order** of **Melchizedek.**”
4. How **sad** that instead of becoming **more mature** they have become **less**. They have **reverted** into a **condition** of **spiritual immaturity**.
5. **Never forget** that it is **impossible** to **stand still** in our Christian lives: We are **either** moving **forward** in our relationship with Jesus Christ or we are going **backwards**.
6. If we are not **progressing** then we are **regressing**. There is no good “**status quo**” position in our **individual lives** or our **corporate life** as a **church family**.
7. **Don’t think** for a **minute** that an **apathetic, status quo attitude** that is **committed** to stay in one’s **comfort zone** and **resists change** at all **costs** doesn’t **radically affect** one’s spiritual life. These believers show us that since they did not **advance spiritually**, it **resulted** in them once again becoming **spiritual beginners**.
8. The **second aspect** of spiritual immaturity is:

## II. The Cause of Spiritual Immaturity

A. Look at v. **13**: For everyone who **partakes only** of **milk** is **not accustomed** to the **word of righteousness**, for he is an **infant**.

1. Here we see that the **reason** or **cause** of their spiritual immaturity is because they are **spiritual babies** who are “not **accustomed** to the **word of righteousness**” and can only drink milk. Now spiritual “**milk**” or **baby food**, the ABC’s of God’s Word, is a **good thing**.
2. Peter said in **1 Peter 2:2**, “Like **newborn babies**, **long** for the **pure milk** of the **word**, so that **by it** you may **grow** in respect to salvation.”
3. Spiritual “**milk**” is **necessary** for **new believers** because they cannot **digest** anything stronger. You don’t give a **steak** to a **newborn child** because they don’t have any **teeth** to eat it.
4. Although **believers** never **outgrow** the “**milk**” of God’s Word because it involves the **fundamentals** of our **faith**, we must **never stop** there! However, notice that these believers “**partake only** of **milk**,” which is an indication that something is **seriously wrong**.
5. A **newborn baby** who needs his or her **mother’s milk** is a beautiful thing. But it is **tragic** if that baby becomes an **adult** and is still drinking from a **baby bottle**.
6. These **immature believers** can only **tolerate** a **diet of spiritual milk** is because they have **reverted** back to be **spiritual “infants”** or **babies** who are “**not accustomed** to the **word of righteousness**.”
7. The apostle Paul said the **same thing** about the **Corinthians** in **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you

as to **spiritual men**, but as to **men of flesh**, as to **infants** in Christ. I gave you **milk** to drink, not **solid food**; for you were **not yet able** to **receive** it. Indeed, even now you are **not yet able**, for you are **still fleshly**...”

8. We don't know how many of these Jewish Christians were spiritual “**infants**,” but those who were are “**not accustomed to the word of righteousness**.” The words “**not accustomed to**” means to be **inexperienced** and **unskilled**.
9. Since **baby Christians** are **inexperienced** and **unskilled** they have **no idea** how to put the “**word of righteousness**” to use.
10. Although there are **various views** as to what the “**word of righteousness**” is, I believe it is best to see it as referring to the **righteous of life** described in God's Word that He expects believers to follow. **Homer Kent, Jr.** states, “It can hardly be that **righteousness** here means ‘**justification**,’ for these readers are **appealed** to on the **basis** that they are **babes in Christ** and thus have **experienced** the **imputed righteousness** of Christ. . . . **Verse 14** clearly states that **discernment of right and wrong** is involved, and that this should be the **normal experience** of believers who have **grown spiritually**. Thus the **word of righteousness** would refer to God's revelation about **righteousness of life** which is **expected** of every believer. Christian faith is not an **abstraction**. It is never **divorced** from **life**. The **content of doctrine** to which the believer assents **must** issue in a **transformed life** or something is **radically wrong**. Scripture

gives **no comfort** whatever to the person whose **claim** to have trusted Christ has not **resulted** in a **life of righteousness**.” (p. 104)

11. This brings us to the **third aspect** of spiritual immaturity, which is:

### III. The Cure for Spiritual Immaturity

A. Look at **v. 14**: But **solid food** is for the **mature**, who because of **practice** have their **senses trained** to **discern good and evil**.

1. The word “**But**” shows the **contrast** between the **spiritual “infant”** in **v. 13** and the **spiritually “mature”** here.
2. The author uses **terms of human development**—“**infant**” and “**mature**” to describe believers’ **development** in their Christian faith. He wants to **wean** these **spiritually immature** believers from the **milk-stage** and begin to **feed** them the “**solid food**” or **meat** of God’s Word.
3. Here we see that “solid food is for the (spiritually) mature” believer. **Spiritual maturity**, which can be defined as increased conformity to **Christlikeness**, is **God’s goal** for every believer (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:13, 15; Col. 1:28).
4. Paul said to the **Galatians** in **Galatians 4:19**, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until **Christ** is **formed** in you.”
5. And since this is **God’s goal** for us, it should also be **our goal** that we are **diligently pursuing**. Paul declared in **Philippians 3:12**, “Not that I have already **obtained** it or have already become **perfect**, but I **press on** so that I may **lay hold** of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

6. Now although **perfect Christlikeness** in our lives will not be **attained** until we see Jesus face to face (1 Jn. 3:2), this is what we are to **strive** for. But it **won't happen** just because we've been a Christian for **X number** of years, for **time alone** never produces **spiritual maturity**.
7. The **cure** for **spiritual immaturity** is seen in the statement, "...because of **practice** (the mature) have their **senses trained** to **discern good** and **evil**." Here we see a **process** to spiritually mature in our Christian lives.
8. The word "**senses**" refers to our **faculties of perception**, the **capacities** for **spiritual apprehension**. These **senses** are to be "**trained**" or **exercised** (NKJV), which speaks of becoming spiritually **skilled** through **discipline**.
9. The word "**trained**" is an **athletic term** used for the **rigorous discipline** of an **athlete** training his body and mind for a contest. The same word is used in **1 Timothy 4:7-8** where we are told, "...**discipline** yourself for the **purpose** of **godliness**; 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**."
10. The word "**practice**" speaks of a **fixed habit** due to **continuous obedience** that gives us **experience**. Therefore, it is by the **continuous "practice"** or **obedience** to God's Word that our **faculties of perception** become **skilled** through **trained discipline**, so that we **grow** to become more **spiritually mature**.

11. It is **absolutely crucial** that we continually “**practice**” or **obey** God’s Word in our daily lives to **grow! Righteous living is essential for spiritual maturity!**
  12. Just as our **physical muscles** atrophy without constantly **using** them, so our **spiritual muscles** atrophy without constantly **obeying** what we know God has told us to do in His Word. Now obviously, we cannot **live out** what we don’t **know**, but merely **knowing** God’s Word is **not enough**.
  13. We must **do** what we **know!** This is why **James 1:22** tells us, “But **prove** yourselves **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers** who **delude** themselves.”
  14. Here we see that if we are **not doing** what we **know** then no matter how “**good**” we may **think** we are or how “**spiritually mature**” we may consider ourselves to be, we are only “**deluding**” ourselves. That’s **scary!**
- B. Therefore, as we “**practice**” God’s Word so as to “**train**” our spiritual “**senses**,” it is then that we are able “to **discern good and evil**.”
1. The word “**discern**” means to separate, to judge, distinguish and discriminate between. **Spiritual discernment** is a basic quality of **maturity**, even in ordinary human life.
  2. **For example, small children** have **no concept** of what is **good** or **bad** for them. They will **stick** almost anything into their mouth, **touch** anything they can reach, and **go** anywhere they can manage to crawl.

3. This is why **wise** and **loving parents** put **baby-locks** on the cupboards, **plastic protectors** in the electrical outlets and **put** all dangerous items and valuable things out of their reach.
4. **Good judgment** comes with the accumulation of **experiences**, and this **demand**s the passage of time. This is also true for **newborn Christians** and **immature believers** who lack **spiritual discernment**.
5. The on-going **practice** of **obedience** to Christ in **righteous living trains** their **senses** and gives them the **skill** and **experience** to “discern **good** and **evil**.” But this **process** does take **time**!
6. Because of their **lack** of **biblical knowledge**, spiritually **immature** believers can **listen** to those who **claim** to **teach** God’s Word, but they are **not yet able** to **identify** whether or not the person is **true** to the Scriptures.
7. This is why **Ephesians 4:14** says that “we are **no longer** to be **children**, tossed here and there by **waves** and carried about by every **wind of doctrine**, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”
8. It is only as we **know** God’s Word, the **final standard** of **truth** and **morality**, and **continually apply** it in our daily lives that we will be able to **grow** in our **ability** to **discern** between what is **good** and **evil** and maintain a **righteousness of life** that **chooses** the **good** and **shuns** the **evil**.
9. Only the **spiritually mature** (or **maturing**) are able to make these kinds of **discerning judgments** on the continual **moral issues** that arise in life. And the **more mature** we become the

**less** we will make the **foolish choices** that **characterize** those who are **spiritually immature**.

### **Conclusion:**

Now **practically**, how do we **apply** a passage like this to our lives today? I think the **first thing** each one of us needs to do is **ask**, “Have I become “**dull in hearing**? Am I **spiritually lazy** and **apathetic**, **satisfied** with the **status quo**? Do I give only a **token effort** to God’s Word and prayer and spiritual things while my **heart** is **captured** by **other interests** and **prioritizes**?

If **any** of these things are **true** in our lives, then we are **like** these Jewish Christians the author is addressing. We have **backslidden** and possibly **reverted** all the way back to being **spiritual infants** that can partake only of **spiritual milk**. And the **scary thing** is that we may **actually think** we are **doing fine**! But in **reality**, we are like the **Ephesians** and **Laodiceans** in the book of **Revelation** who have **left** their **first love** and become **lukewarm**, **spiritually apathetic** in our Christian lives.

As we have seen, the **cure** is to get back to **doing** what we **know**? But for this to **happen** there needs to be **personal revival**, whereby we turn to God in **repentance** and He **restores** His **backslidden** people to a **renewed faith, love** and **obedience** to Him. We see a **clear process** for this in the **three commands** that Jesus told the Ephesian believers in **Revelation 2:5**:

1. **First**, “...**remember** from **where** you have fallen.” In other words, **remember** your **past excitement** in the **early days** when you **first received** Jesus as your **Savior** and **Lord**. Your **gratitude** to

God for His **forgiveness** and **cleansing** of your sin, your **passionate love** for Him for all He had done for you, your **hunger** and **thirst** for God and His Word that you couldn't get enough of, your **desire** to know Him and spend time talking to Him in prayer, and your **desire** to share your faith with those who were lost.

2. **Second**, “and **repent**.” Since **sin** is our problem, **repentance** is the only solution. We must turn **from sin** and turn **to God**. We are to **turn** from whatever we have **idolatrously placed** before God in our lives and **put Jesus first** as the **Supreme Treasure** in our heart.
3. **Third**, “...and **do the deeds** you **did at first**.” In other words, **do** what you **know**. We must **return** and do what we **used** to do. We must **feed** our soul on God's Word, **saturate** our mind with God's moral standards of righteousness, **listen intently** to what the Lord is telling us in His Word, and in **total dependence** on Him **wholeheartedly obey** all that God tells us to do in His Word.

Whenever we get **off track** in our relationship with Jesus Christ we need to **remember**, **repent** and **return** to **do** what we **know**. This is not only the **path** to **personal revival**; it is also the **road** to **spiritual maturity**. May **none of us** be spiritually **apathetic** and **immature**, **satisfied** with **partaking** only of the **milk** of God's Word. But rather may we all **passionately thirst** for God and because of our **wholehearted obedience** to Christ, **grow** to **partake** of the “**solid food**” of His Word, so that we can **become** more like Christ and **live a righteous life** that **pleases** Him.