
Words of Truth

Hebrews 5:12-14

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We have learned that the recipients of this letter were not ready to learn because they were dull of hearing (Hebrews 5:11). Now we learn this: *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Hebrews 5:12-14).

We should start off by noting that the writer of this book is not suggesting that everyone is capable of teaching. Even in the age of spiritual gifts, only “some” were capable of being teachers (I Corinthians 12:28-29 and Ephesians 4:11). If you do a word study on the term translated “teachers” (Strong’s # 1320), you will find that term is also translated “masters” in some passages. One of those passages instructs for some not to take on the work of being a teacher because of the judgment that comes on teachers (James 3:1). So, this writer was not suggesting that everyone there should have become teachers by the time he penned this letter. Now that we have the often false conclusion out of the way, let’s consider what is being taught.

The saints addressed in this epistle should have been more mature in knowledge than they were. As a Christian grows, there should be some maturity in knowledge. Enough maturity in knowledge that, he or she could instruct if he or she was capable of doing so. You see this in what Paul said to Titus about older Christian women. Notice: *“The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed”* (Titus 2:3-5). Those addressed in this epistle had not grown as they should have in knowledge (II Peter 3:18). The result of that lack of growth was that they were still spiritually babes. That is like saying a fifteen year old child needs breastfed. Something is wrong with that picture.

The penman of this letter establishes one of the problems with their lack of growth. A babe in knowledge is unskillful in the word of righteousness. It is a fact that those who attempt to teach, without the knowledge to do so, can do more harm than good. Before you read what

I am about to quote, think about how someone may have a physical capability of teaching, but not the knowledge to do so. A father may be capable of bringing up his child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). However, he may be completely incapable of answering some Scriptural questions a person might have. Now, take note of Paul's words to Timothy: *"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm"* (I Timothy 1:3-7).

Strong meat and milk are carnal illustrations to teach this spiritual point. There should be no need for explanation there. Milk is for the babe (I Peter 2:1-2). Strong meat is for those whom are "of full age" (I Corinthians 14:20 and Ephesians 4:13-14). Now, we need to remember that first century Christians were directly aided by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3-11 and I John 2:27). So, this passage isn't telling them to study more Scriptures. Rather, the mature Christian is one who uses the knowledge given to them. They needed to mature in using spiritual discernment rather than their carnal knowledge (I Corinthians 2:14-3:3).

Bring this all together for a moment before we consider some applications for us today. For them, they needed to mature in Christ through application of the knowledge they had been given through teaching and through the Spirit of God. This was a wake up call. It wasn't the Hebrew writer saying they were going to hit some restart button on teaching. The context will bear that out as they needed to leave the first principles and move on (Hebrews 6:1-3). It was time for them to grow up spiritually.

The applications for us today are a little different than a first century Christian may have had to experience. If one of us is not where we should be in maturity, we are going to have to spend time learning before we can move on to application. If knowledge isn't in us, we are not going to get it directly from the Spirit of God. Help may be needed. That is when we can turn to those capable of teaching. We can learn. Like the Psalmist, we can then meditate upon the word of God, be wiser, and live what we learned (Psalms 119:97-105). The unlearned cannot just accept being indefinitely immature.

Being a babe in Christ makes a child of God vulnerable just like a physical baby in this world. A lack of knowledge makes it easy for a person to twist Scriptures to their own destruction (II Peter 3:15-17). A lack of knowledge makes it easy for a person to be misled by predators (II Timothy 3:1-7). A person without the ability to discern makes them naive and capable of being tricked (Romans 16:17-18). Whether then or now, saints need to grow through knowledge and proper application of that knowledge (II Peter 1:3-11)!