

Hebrews 5 (Part 2) :11-14 • Solid food is for the mature

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We're in Hebrews. Let's go there, please. We are making our way here on Sunday morning through the New Testament. We're in Hebrews Chapter 5, and we're going to finish that chapter this morning with the last four verses? Yeah, 11, 12, 13, and 14. And I'm going to go ahead and read. Follow along as I do, then we'll pray. Verse 11:

“¹¹About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For 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, ¹³for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for your Word and the power of it. We believe that it nourishes our hearts, equips us, and prepares us for the days to come.

We pray that You would do that today—all of that. We humbly present our hearts to You. We ask God that You would fill us with understanding, insight and truth. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.

Leading up to these last few verses of Hebrews Chapter 5, the author of this letter has been teaching about the High Priestly ministry of Jesus and how that ministry was prefigured by the Old Testament priesthood that functioned under the Mosaic Law, but then also how it was prefigured in—in a particular and rather mysterious Old Testament character by the name of Melchizedek.

And that gets into some stuff, and he has a lot more to say about this stuff, but he stops here. And in what almost sounds to me like an outburst of frustration a little bit, he begins to confront his readers with their stunted spiritual growth. And the very first thing he says to them—as he kind of pauses with this little interlude—he says about all this stuff—and he's talking about the fact that he's

been getting into this whole High Priestly ministry of Jesus, how Jesus has taken over that position of High Priest in God's redemptive program.

He says, you know, we have a lot more to say about this, but it's kind of hard. And I don't know if this is an offensive thing to say to people or not, but he says, it's kind of hard to explain, not because I'm having—not because I don't understand it, but because you guys are dull of hearing. And when he says dull of hearing, this is not something that, you know, a hearing aid can solve.

Not that they had those back then. And I imagine hearing loss was probably just as common back in those days as it is today, especially, well, I don't know, those of us who exposed ourselves to the 70's rock and roll might be a little worse off than some of the others, but, you know, enough about us.

Anyway, this isn't a physical condition that he's talking about here. This is a spiritual condition, and the Greek term for dull literally means slow or sluggish. So, he says you're slow of hearing. It means that they were having trouble receiving the Word of God. They could hear it just fine with their physical ears.

It was embracing it, receiving it, that was a problem. And it's a condition that I think we should probably think about a little bit, because I don't think it's gone away by any stretch, and it's one that we need to consider. But because I think it has been something perhaps that some of us may have dealt with in the past, some of us may even be dealing with now, and you may have people in your family, or good friends or something like that for whom this condition applies.

You ever talk to somebody about the Scriptures, and they just kind of like have that glazed look on their face? Or it just kind of looks like you just were speaking another language there for a moment, and they were listening politely and nodding, but it didn't really get through.

And that's kind of what we're talking about there. But you know, what's interesting about this is the question, how did this author know that his audience was dull of hearing? I mean, he's not in the same room with them. He's not able to kind of look at their facial expressions. He can't see if their mouths are hanging open or if they're kind of nodding off or looking off into space or jotting down unrelated notes.

How does he know? How is it that this man can just kind of stop in the midst of this very important teaching on the person of Jesus Christ, His importance and superiority over the Law, and then just say, you know I'd like to say more about

this, but you guys are really kind of just dull, and you're slow to understand the things that we've been sharing.

Well, I'll tell you how he knew. He knew it because he saw what was happening to their faith. And that's how he knew. We, you know, we've made the point several times as we've studied through here in Hebrews, that the recipients of this letter were Jews who had come to faith in Jesus Christ, but now were experiencing persecution and social pressure to the point that they were beginning to waffle on the importance of the cross as the only means of our salvation.

They were beginning to waffle on that. They were kind of backing away a little bit from that, from that whole thing. And the reason is because, you know, they were getting a lot of pushback from their fellow Jews, because the Jews considered the cross of Christ to be an extremely offensive thing.

We forget that. To us, the cross—I mean, we understand, it's interesting, you know, we sang this morning, you know, “He's leading us to the cross.” I liked that lyric in connection with what we're saying today in this study. But to us, the cross—we understand the cross of Christ is the means by which we are saved.

But to us it's a rather beautiful thing. I mean, it's something we appreciate. But for the Jews, it was incredibly offensive because their own Hebrew Scriptures told them that anyone who was hung on a tree—and a cross qualified—was cursed of God. Let me show you where that's actually shown. This is in the book of Deuteronomy, up on the screen for you to see. From Deuteronomy Chapter 21, it says:

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Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (ESV)

...if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, (look at this) for a hanged man is cursed by God.

And as far as the Jews were concerned, Jesus totally met that description. So, you can understand how a Jew, who'd been raised on the Torah, would think about these Christians who come along claiming that this man who is clearly cursed according to my Bible, you're telling me He's the anointed one? And my Bible tells me He's the cursed one.

Not only are you trying to convince me the cursed one is the anointed one—which is what Messiah means—you're trying to tell me that what He did on that cursed thing over the cross, is that He made a way for me to be righteous before God? This cursed man is going to make me righteous before God? To a Jew, not only was that ridiculous in the extreme, it was hideous to think about and offensive. And that's exactly what the Apostle Paul wrote concerning the Jews. Check this out from 1 Corinthians 1:23. He said:

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1 Corinthians 1: 23 (ESV)

...but we preach Christ crucified, (and what is that, it's) a stumbling block to (the) Jews...

Why was it a stumbling block? Because their Scriptures said a man hung on a tree is cursed. And by the way, Jesus was cursed. It's true. He was cursed for you. How he can be the cursed one and the anointed one is just the mysteries of God.

That's the part they couldn't get. To them it was just—you know. So, in any way, so for the believing Jews to whom this letter is addressed, for them to somehow remove some of that offensive language and offensive ideas from their belief, they began to compromise the message of the cross.

And the way they would do that is they would introduce certain elements of the Mosaic Law into the Gospel to kind of make it a little more palatable to a Jew. Right? And you know, if we can bring a little Judaism, a little bit of Law-keeping into the Gospel, we can deflect some of this persecution, some of this pushback that we're getting from our neighbors.

Now you'll recall that when the Apostle Paul penned his letter to the churches in the region of Galatia, this is exactly what was going on in that area. Those Christians—although they were Gentiles in that case—they had been, they were being influenced by Jews who were making their way up to that region of Galatia, and they were basically telling the people that they had to practice circumcision along with believing in the message of the cross.

They were saying, “Oh yeah, Jesus, cross, cool. That's all good and fine, but you also need to be circumcised according to the Law in order for you to be saved.” And so, these were the same kind of people. These were the same kind of people—these Jews who had compromised the cross—and now were trying to influence Gentile Christians in the case of the Galatian churches—and these

people that were coming to the region of Galatia were even telling them, “This is what Paul preaches. You know the Apostle Paul who came and talked. Oh yeah, he's totally in agreement with us.”

So, Paul wrote his letter back to the churches there. Do you remember what he said? Galatians 5:11 up on the screen, he said, listen, he says:

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Galatians 5:11(ESV)

...if I...still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? (and then he said this) In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

You get it? You see, to add a Jewish element to the Gospel is to remove some of that offensiveness and to make it more palatable.

So, Paul says, “Hey, listen, I'm not preaching circumcision. If I was preaching circumcision, I probably wouldn't be behind bars most of the time. And I wouldn't be constantly in disfavor with my fellow Jews.” So, you see this temptation, you know, was very strong among these believing Jews to remove the offense of the cross.

But the problem is when you remove the offense of the cross, either because of hardship or persecution, you remove the power of the Gospel. You want to take away the offense of the cross because people are offended by it. Fine. But you're not going to end up with the Gospel. You're going to end up with something less.

And to do this—to change the gospel message by adding some element of legalism or whatever to it—is to cause an individual to actually fall away from the Lord. To fall away from the Lord. And Jesus told us that it was so, that it was possible, when He gave to us the Parable of the Sower. And in the Parable of the Sower, you'll remember that He spoke of the Word of God, likening it to seed that fell upon different kinds of ground. And there is a portion of that parable—I'll put it on the screen for you from Matthew 13, which says:

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Matthew 13:18, 20-21 (ESV)

“Hear then the parable of the sower: As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (even) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and (look at this) when

tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

And this is what this author is trying to avoid by writing this letter to these people, these Christians, these Jews. He's trying to awaken them to this idea, but the very fact that they were beginning to entertain some sort of an understanding of righteousness through the Law—or should I say, they were going back to an understanding of righteousness through the Law—was proof that to him that they'd become dull of hearing.

So, you know, you think about what had early Christians, what were they taught about the Law? What were they taught concerning the Law of God? How were they to understand the Law? Well, let me show you what Paul taught, Romans Chapter 3. Paul wrote:

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Romans 3:19-20 (ESV)

“...we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under (it, who are under) the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, (that’s a big statement) since through the law comes knowledge of sin. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Now, this is the stuff that was taught to the early Christians. They were told that what the Law says, it says to those who are under it. Because it is given to us to show how—just how sinful we really are, but it was never given to us as a means of our righteous standing before God.

You can't be righteous before God according to the Law, because you can't keep the Law perfectly. You'd have to keep it perfectly in order to be, you know, in righteous standing before God based on the Law. So, this is the kind of stuff that the, these Christians were taught, and it was tough. It was probably a tough lesson for these Jews who'd been raised on the Law, raised on the Torah, raised on the understanding—I mean, they had it just drilled into their brain that our righteous standing is through the Law.

And then they came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. And they began to embrace and accept the fact that we cannot be righteous according to the Law. Our righteousness is, in fact, imputed to us by Jesus Christ through His death on

the cross for us, where He bore our penalty, our Law-breaking. Right? And they embraced that, but now they're beginning to swerve from it.

Now they're beginning to kind of deviate from that message, and that's why the author goes on to say—look with me in your Bible in Verse 12, here in Hebrews 5. He says, 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.*"

And what he's saying here is that you people ought to be at the place where you're ready to instruct others in these things, but you can't. Because you need to be taught again. The fact that you're deviating from the cross tells me that you are not grounded in these things to the point where there's a maturity, and you need someone to go over with you the basic principles.

What are the basic principles? You know *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* Wonderful principle, but it's basic. We're all sinners. You know, I have to go over that with baby Christians over and over again. I have to, you know—you got to keep repeating it. We're all sin—have you ever noticed that when you're with a little child, you got to repeat things over and over and over again until they get it. And then you—with a baby Christian, you have to explain the wages of sin is death. Jesus bore our death through His, on the cross, and all who put their faith in Him are saved, forgiven.

Guys, those are basics. That's like, you know, zipping up your zipper and tying your shoes. You're getting the basics down. It's the milk of the Word. And don't get me wrong, milk is good. But a diet of milk alone is what we expect if you're a baby. Right? But you know, look at what Peter said in his first letter. "1 Peter Chapter 2, he says:

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1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up (in your) salvation—

And what he's saying there is, "Great. The milk is wonderful, but grow up," you know. There's a point where you got to grow up, and there's a point where you got to begin to take solid food.

And solid food is what this author is trying to give to these people, which is interesting because after this little short interlude here in the end of Chapter 5, he's going to get back into it and he's going to, he's going to keep giving him solid food throughout the rest of this letter. He really does. So, he is kind of like telling them, you know, get ready.

You might need to wash this down, because this is going to be a mouthful. But we have an expectation that you're going to grow up and do this. Look what he goes on to say in, in Verse 14. He says, "*Solid food is for the mature.*" In other words, when you got your teeth, and you can chew. You can bite and you can break it up.

You know how to break up the Word so that you can digest it. You know, solid food doesn't mean I put a steak in my mouth and gulp it down. It means that I chew it up and make it so my body can assimilate it. And so, the teeth that we gain spiritually speaking is our ability to read our Bible and break it down, and look at it, not just read it.

People write me all the time, just say, "You know, when I read my Bible, I just don't get it." Well, very few people do if you're just reading the Bible but you're not thinking and meditating on what you're reading—taking notes, breaking it out, and maybe even circling words or underlining words and then praying, and "Lord what do you mean there? What's that mean?"

That's that chewing process, right? Where we kind of break it down. You know, I mean, that's what I do every Sunday and every Wednesday when we're going through the Word, I break it down. We go through the Word. We talk about what the words mean. I give you some of the Greek or Hebrew meanings to help maybe give a little dynamic relevance to the Word, and we talk about it.

And that's why people assimilate better when they're being taught or when they're breaking it down and so forth. Just, I mean, just reading through the Bible, I'll be honest with you, just reading through the Bible doesn't do a great—a whole lot for just, for me and I'm—this is my third time teaching through the whole Bible.

This is where I really grow. I love teaching through the Bible because I grow. I mean, I benefit from the time spent in the Word, but just reading through the Scriptures doesn't do a lot for me, because I'm one of those incredibly distractable people. Maybe you are too. And I read a page and I get done reading it, and I go, "I didn't hear anything. I just read."

Anybody like that? Remember doing that in school? Remember when the teacher would tell you to read a chapter and then you're going to have a test and you read through the chapter and realized the whole time you were thinking about what you were going to do after school. But you read it. But the words just went—[sound effect]—they were gone.

And then she goes, “All right, close your book. We're going to have a test.” And you're like, “I don't even know what I read. I got to guess.” Now my wife—not to embarrass her or anything like that—she reads through her Bible, the entire Bible, every year, which is, you know, wonderful. And I've done that before too, but she gets a lot out of it, just reading through it. I don't. I have to—I have to stop, you know, and really focus. “All right, what are we looking at here?” You know.

And I got to break it up and take notes and stuff like that. It's just, you know, that's the chewing process. You know. It's important to, to do. And when you're mature, you get teeth, and you start chewing and you break things up and so forth. But if you don't get mature, if you don't mature at some point, then your growth in the Lord is going to become stagnant. You're going to just plateau, and you get to a point—and you've probably have been there in your own life, or you know somebody else who has gotten to a place in their spiritual growth and they're growing and growing and then just got—[sound effect] they don't really move past it.

They're just kind of there, and there are all kinds of reasons why that happens, I suppose. But, I mean, as I think about some of those reasons, I suppose, you know, it could be that a person is attending a church where there's no real teaching ministry going on, and that will cause a person to plateau. If you're going to church and you're hearing basic Christianity week after week after week after week in the form of a topical kind of a message or something like that, you're probably—you're not going to be encouraged to dig in and chew the meat of the Word.

I've had people, you know, come here and say, “You know, Pastor Paul, I have learned more in six months coming to here than 10 years somewhere else.” Well, it's not me. It's just going through the Word and taking time to do it chapter by chapter and verse by verse. That's how we grow.

I really believe this method that we use on Sundays and Wednesdays is the means by which Christians grow and mature in the Word. I really do. And I wish more churches did it. I mean, taught—didn't just teach the Bible. I wish

they would teach through the Bible—the whole thing, Genesis to Revelation—and don't leave out anything.

I'll never forget one time, years—many years ago, I was talking to a lady. She didn't attend our church, but her daughter did at the time, and she was like—we were just kind of chatting about church and she said, “I understand you're teaching through Leviticus?” And she said it in kind of a way of like, “How in the world do you teach through Leviticus?”

And you know, if you've ever just read through Leviticus and you think “We're going to go to church tonight and we're going to go through Leviticus.” You might kind of think, “Well, that's going to be boring.” Seriously, because when you read through it, there's just a lot of details and that don't seem to be very relevant at all.

And yet, our—every time we go through the Book of Leviticus, it's one of the coolest studies. It really is when you take time to chew it up and assimilate it and see what's really kind of going on there.

I think other times when people just don't grow, it's kind of what's it could be because of what's happening like here in this case with this, these people that, that are the recipients of this letter—there's some kind of compromise going on. Now, their compromise with the Gospel was going on because of persecution. And it could, but compromise can happen for all kinds of different reasons.

You know, when we first started this church, almost 30 years—well it was over 30 years ago now—but it like in the first year of our fellowship here, I got a call from a guy who had been to church, and he called me up to tell me that I was wrong because I had made some comment in the message about Mormonism. And I don't even remember what I said, but I was probably just comparing Christianity with— Biblical Christianity—with Mormonism, which of course is the farthest thing from Biblical Christianity.

And he called me that during the week to tell me I was wrong. And he was very forceful about it. And he told me, you know, he wanted me to know that Mormonism was no different than any other Christian denomination. It was just, they had their own little stuff, differences. But it was no major differences at all.

And I mean, whatever I said, it just, it wasn't impacting this guy at all. And as we talked, it came out in our conversation that his daughter had just recently married a practicing Mormon. And he desperately wanted to believe that his daughter had made a good decision. And so, for the love of his daughter, he

decided that the cross of Christ wasn't that big of a deal. That's called compromise. Okay.

And I understand the reason behind it, just like I understand what was going on in this letter. You know, at the very first church that I was on staff at, back in the 80's, one of our, one of the pastors on staff was relating to me about a gal who used to attend their fellowship years before.

And this lovely saint had prayed for her unbelieving husband for many many years. Prayed diligently that he would come to know Christ as his Savior. And he finally passed away without ever confessing Christ, which is of course a terrible thing. But the pastor shared with me how after the woman's husband passed, she slowly began to change her position on who can be saved, and she eventually adopted an idea that everyone is saved regardless of whether they accept Jesus or not. By the way, that's called universalism, and it's common, common teaching. I—but this woman adopted it because of—she just wasn't able to deal with the emotional fallout from understanding or knowing that her husband had not come to faith in Jesus Christ.

And so it goes—compromise, you know. Because, you know, as we've said, the message of the cross is hard to hear, because it's unrelenting. It's uncompromising. The message of the cross never compromises. By the way, the message of the cross always wins. The cross always wins. It wins every argument. Because it is an instrument of death, and instruments of death are not particularly nice to talk about, but they always win their arguments.

And the reason that the cross is so difficult and so unrelenting is because in it, the message of the cross removes every possibility of our being saved on the basis of my, my, my behavior, my goodness. In fact, the cross tells me I have no goodness. That's what the cross tells me. Jesus came right out and said, “No one's good, but God.”

There you go. “Oh, he's such a good person.” No, actually he's not. I mean, I know what you're saying. You're saying compared to other people, you know, but, fundamentally, essentially, we are not good, and the cross reminds us of that. That means there's nothing in you, there's nothing in me that can possibly present itself to God in such a way that He's going to go, “Oh, hey, all right. You're in.”

Nothing. And the cross reminds me of that. And it's—and who wants to be reminded of that message? “You're not good enough. You're not good enough for Heaven. How you like that?” You know. Well, thanks a bunch. Not a very

nice thing to say. That's what the cross says. Says that we're under a death sentence, and you can't do anything about it. It's a hard message to swallow. Listen to this word from John's Gospel:

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John 3:18

Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe (they're) condemned already, (why?) because (they have) not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

That's hard. That's in your face hard. This is what the cross—this is the message of the cross. The only way you're going to remove the condemnation that you were born under is by embracing Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. That's it. It's the only way. You can try to be good all your life, you'll never measure up. That's what the cross says.

That's a, that's—this world—I don't believe it's very long now before this world will start to see the message of the cross as hate language, hate speech. I believe we're close. I believe we're close here in the United States of America where the teaching of the Bible is going to be considered hate speech, maybe even closer than we think.

So, I guess we should probably think about that. Huh? When that happens, are you going to keep telling people what the Bible really says? What if it means loss of your job? What if it means going to jail? You still want to—you still going to tell people what the Bible says without compromise?

You see what these people were under, these Jewish Christians? You see what they were under? They were under that and more. Loss of work? Oh yeah. Imprisoned? Sure. Loss of their lives? Very possibly.

You still going to—you still going to preach the cross? You still going to tell people there is no other way for you to be saved than Jesus Christ? You know the temptations can be overwhelming because you just want the bad stuff to go away. Stop hassling my children. Stop harassing my wife. Leave us alone. And pretty soon, you know, it just comes to the point where we kind of snap and all right. Okay.

Now it's the cross plus, plus something, plus something, plus something. And you know, the seriousness of this is such that as we get into Hebrews Chapter 6—and some of you are very familiar with Hebrews Chapter 6—but as we get

into it next week, Lord willing, we're going to read in that Chapter, in the first several verses, what is arguably one of the strongest warnings given in the entirety of God's Word.

It's a very debated warning. There's a lot of different thoughts and opinions about what it means, but pretty much everybody agrees on the fact that it's a strong warning. And we're going to look at it, and we're going to deal with it. And I'm probably going to make some enemies next week. But be that as it may, we're going to stick to the cross.

We're going to stick to the cross. It's never ever going to be a popular message. And Jesus said to us, "If they hate you, just remember they hated me first." So, but I think what we'll do is we'll end with an important statement in the New Testament from Romans Chapter 1. Paul wrote:

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Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel (and the reason is, it's) ...the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, (and that's a—that's a term that means from the beginning faith to the end of faith; from faith to faith) as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

And that's the message. And that's the challenge that we have before us because we don't live in Mayberry anymore.