



Ministry of the Word

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by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 5:11-14 and 6:1

Subject: Part 13,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Chapter 6 verse 1 - *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*

Last time we considered verses 7 through to 11. In verse 11 we began to focus on the 'dull of hearing' but it is really verses 12 to 14 that concludes that point. Let us take up the train of thought regarding the tragedy of rejecting full revelation of God by closing our ears to him, shutting down, so to speak. Dull of hearing is very pervasive in our society. Let's be honest and say, that it is not difficult to see this as it gets spiritually darker. Would it surprise you that we find this now in the "Christian" church today; the very place you would not expect to find it because we have been charged by none other than the Lord Himself to go and preach the Gospel, which is the whole counsel of God. We see in our text the danger and damage from rejecting God's revelation.

In verses 12 to 14 the point is well made, in relation to those who had been under instruction of New Testament truth. They should have known enough to be teaching it themselves. The problem was these people on the fringe of decision had never truly accepted it, they had not grown in it, and what is more they had no longing to grow in it.

They had been exposed to a great deal of God's truth to the extent that they could have passed an examination. By that, I mean, they had the truth academically, factually, and superficially but the truth did not have them in any-way. They could talk the talk but not walk the walk. Remember we alluded to the fact, that many did not start out that way but became that way gradually.

Paul charged the believers in Rome which were Hellenists Jews with the following words as found in Romans 2:17-21.

“But if you bear the name of Jew and rely upon the Law and pride yourselves in God and your relationship to Him, ¹⁸ And know and understand His will and discerningly approve the better things and have a sense of what is vital, because you are instructed by the Law; ¹⁹ And if you are confident that you [yourself] are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, and [that ²⁰ You are] a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the childish, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ Well then, you who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you teach against stealing, do you steal (take what does not really belong to you)?”

You see the Jews prided themselves in the notion that they alone were the greatest religious teachers about the true and living God, because of their traditions and knowledge. Yet in the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit says explicitly what is implicit in Romans 2. These Jews were not only unqualified to teach but they needed to go back to kindergarten because they did not sincerely understand the ABC's of their own faith. This was evident to the writer on account of their unwillingness to recognise the clear fulfilment of Scripture. This was not just an early church problem but is still a problem today. Let me illustrate this for you -

Every Easter on the TV, there has been many professing 'Christians', just like some of those Jews. These professing Christians are chosen to give explanations of the festivities because they are theologians, mostly from liberal colleges and universities. They often specialise in Scriptural text and history as well as biblical languages, such as Hebrew. They know what the

Bible says. But if you listen long enough, you will realise they do not really know or accept what the bible means. For the amount of time they have studied, they ought to be accurate teachers of the Word of God but they don't even comprehend its fundamentals. They have been "advanced" students of Scripture for decades, and yet, they do not know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. They may teach subjects about the 'bible', but it is not the pure Word of Christ that they teach. They are given the time and space to advance their ideas that are far from the truth, because they are not causing offense to anyone, even though the bible says that the Gospel causes offense to the hearer. They are not saved, yet they have no problem make a living out of "the bible". Dig a little deeper, and you will find that liberal philosophy and pseudo-science plays a big-roll in their thinking. Yet on account of their academic credentials they are believed because those who choose to listen, have not or will not read the Bible for themselves, therefore they lead people astray. These false professing Christians know what they are saying, but they have by choice become "dull of hearing".

There is another key word or phrase there that we missed out on and it is the phrase "hard to explain", what in fact is meant by that?

The theme which the author has mentioned in the previous verses, the priesthood of Christ which belongs to, and indeed constitutes, the order of Melchizedek, is of such importance that, understandably, he has much to say concerning it. Unfortunately, what he wishes to communicate on this theme is hard to explain. Not because it belongs to the realm of cryptic mystery which only the enlightened few are capable of entering or because the author feels himself inadequate as an instructor, but in fact it is hard to explain because those to whom he is writing about are dull of hearing. This suggests that they are not intellectually inferior. It is not a question of what they are by nature but of what they have become by default, implying this was not the case with them originally. They have become slack, and their slackness has affected their attentiveness and their capacity to receive and retain solid instruction. Just like untrained athletes, they cannot do a marathon all of a sudden.

Due to their spiritually lethargicness, the informed but unbelieving Jews needed for someone to teach them. They needed to start all over in the elementary principles of the oracles of God. What are the elementary principles of the oracles of God? Elementary principles means that which comes first. In reference to language, it meant the letters of the alphabet as the

basic parts of words—the ABC's. In science it was used of the basic physical elements, and in math of the basics of proof.

Oracles of God does not refer to the New Testament gospel. Those being addressed were Jews, and to them the oracles of God meant the Old Testament. These oracles meant the laws of God and the mind of God revealed in the Old Testament. They were already entrusted with God's oracles which were great advantage for the Jewish nation throughout their history. Paul reminded them in Romans 3:1 and 2.

“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”

They were supposed to be the witnesses to the nations around them, but mostly refused to do so. Jonah's attitude to go to Nineveh is a prime example of this.

Hebrews points out that it was the rudiments of the Old Testament revelation and the law, that they needed to be taught again. They had regressed so badly that instead of being teachers, they had become unwilful students. They had had considerable exposure to the New Covenant, but they did not even comprehend the Old, as evidenced by their lack of ability to handle deeper truth about Melchizedek.

These Jews did not even comprehend the meaning of their own Law so they actually needed someone to go back and show them the pictures again. They were not ready to read a book; they had to go back to the ABCs, the elementary picture-truths of ordinances, ceremonies, sacrifices, holy washings which foreshadowed Christ, and they could not recognize Him unless they understood the pictures.

You perhaps recall what the people said after Jesus' sermon on the mount found in Matthew chapter 5 to 7? When he had finished the sermon (chapter 7:28-29) they are noted as having been “astonished”.

“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” Matthew 7:28-29

The people in the verses were astonished because Christ was expounding the law of God and teaching them the truth in a different way but it also highlighted that they had not been

properly taught. Many of them, had no doubt, sat under the word in their synagogues for years just like many sit under the truth today for years, but are no wiser or desirous of God.

The Old Testament is the alphabet; the New Testament is the complete, mature message.

"Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith" Galatians 3:23-24

The law was a tutor, a child trainer, that taught the first and basic truths about God. In the New Covenant we are not under the tutor anymore. We should have grown up and this is the point being made here. Christ had arrived, the shadows were replaced with substance, the picture book was replaced with great writings that we can read. The alphabet was replaced with the full composition and the types have given way to the truth.

We, by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, look into the Scriptures and behold Jesus in all His wonderful glory. We are amazed and rejoice at the fulfilment of the prophecies. We get excited as we follow Him in His ministry journey and are mystified and become solemn as we gaze into that "hour", for which he came as we contemplated last week. Not only that when we move from the Gospels into the Epistles we are challenged, we are corrected by the word as well as comforted by exhortations.

In Verse 12, we see that it states that the readers had become in need of milk and not solid food. A baby does not come to need milk. He is born with that need. The only person who comes to need milk and need baby food, is one who becomes sick. Instead of becoming more mature, these Jews were becoming less. They were slipping back into spiritual infancy, what a terrible spiritual sickness.

If you do not progress you regress. By neglect and hardness they had come to the place where they could only handle milk again. It is easy for people to hear the gospel, and then hear it and hear it and hear it until it becomes commonplace and meaningless to them. Instead of pursuing the truth of Christ and giving their lives to Him, they become spiritually sluggish and stagnant. They become dull of hearing and slow of understanding, spiritually retarded. They must be fed again like babies for they cannot handle solid spiritual food.

These Jews who had so long spurned Christ, some of them while professing His name, were not able to take the heavy food of Melchizedek priesthood truth. They would have to start again from the bottom up, gradually increasing their spiritual perception and understanding.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (5:13)

A spiritual infant is not accustomed to deeper truths. He cannot digest them, any more than a physical infant can digest a steak or if an adult has been off their food for a while, their stomach's shrink and they are not able to handle much food. The idea is that of being inexperienced, unskilful, and therefore unprepared and incapable. The spiritual like the physical, has to be feed, nurtured and taken care of to grow in order to handle that which is more difficult. A pre-school child can get something out of looking at a picture book but nothing out of looking at a textbook. A spiritual child, needs to set his mind on The Word of God, educate themselves consistently, not just Sunday mornings or the odd Wednesday night. The more they feed on the word of God, they more they grow and the more they want. They are no longer happy with the milk, they want steak!

I am not necessarily referring to the amount of knowledge we can attain in our minds. Even though this is one sign of growth, but more importantly, is what do we do with what we know, how does that impact our lives? Does it help us to be better Christians? Does it help us to worship the Lord unashamedly before others? To witness of Christ and for Christ? To want to do more to advance the Gospel? It's great to know lots but it is just as easy to forget lots as well. Whether by choice because we have another agenda or because we fail to use what we have, or maybe just maybe, there is need for true repentance and salvation!

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (5:14)

The contrast here is simple. A small child will stick almost anything into his mouth, touch anything he can reach, go anywhere he can manage to crawl, with no concept of what is good for him or what is bad, what is helpful or what is dangerous. The mature adult, on the other hand, should have developed considerable discernment, therefore, he is careful about what he eats, what he does, where he goes.

The same principle operates in the spiritual realm. The mature believer has discernment about what is right and wrong, true and false, helpful and harmful, righteous and unrighteous because they have undergone the process of growing, and continue to do so. They are readers and thinkers in relation to the word of God. Even if you can't read or write, faith comes by hearing, because God's word is powerful but not maturity because maturity is linked to obedience.

Now, we come to chapter 6 and verse 1 which is a continuance of what we have been looking at.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

The key ideas are "leaving" and "pressing on to maturity". These are dual aspects of the same idea. Together they are the first step in these Jews' becoming spiritually mature. They had to leave once and for all their ties with the Old Covenant and traditions to fully accept Jesus Christ as Saviour. 'Leaving', in the Greek language found in this verse means to forsake, to put away, let alone, disregard, put off. It refers to total detachment, total separation, from a previous location or condition. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses the same Greek word in speaking of a Christian husband's not sending away (that is, divorcing) his unbelieving wife. Divorce is total marital separation, complete abandonment of the relationship. The unbelieving Jew must completely divorce himself from his former religion before he can be saved. If that was true for the Jew does not the same apply for all other religions, cults and creeds?

The same Greek word is often used of forgiveness of sins as in *Matthew 9:2,5,6; Romans 4:7; and James 5:15*. When we are forgiven, our sins are put away from us, separated from us, divorced from us. In Matthew 15:14 the same term is used to speak of separating ourselves from false teachers, and in Mark 1:20 it is used of James's and John's leaving their father, Zebedee, in order to follow Jesus. As far as their life's work was concerned, they abandoned, completely separated themselves from, their father and his fishing business.

It is a matter of dropping, leaving, putting away, that which we have been holding onto and taking up something entirely new. It is the provisions and principles of the Old Covenant of Judaism, that are to be dropped. It is not a question of adding to what one has. It is a

question of abandoning what you have for something else. This is precisely what the Holy Spirit asked the Hebrews to do, to abandon the shadows, the types, the pictures, and the sacrifices of the old economy and come to the reality of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. A paraphrase could be, "Leave the pictures of the Messiah and go on to the Messiah Himself," or "Drop the Old Covenant and accept the New."

The readers of these verses were encourage to do it immediately, without further hesitation. Salvation in and off itself is a miracle, however, the maturity aspect that it entails is a process. In fact, we spend the rest of our Christian lives being sanctified and matured. This verse is speaking about leaving the theophany's of Christ in the Old Testament therefore not laying foundation of dead works and of faith towards God, but pressing on to perfection of the Gospel, which is the reality of Christ and a personal relationship with God. Another indication that it is not immature Christians or babes in the Lord that are being addressed because we are never to leave the basics, the elementary teachings, of the gospel, no matter how mature we grow in the faith. Therefore it can only be a reference to unbelievers, because at no time does the Word of God suggest that a Christian drop the basics of Christianity and go on to something else. In these verses there have been three dangers we have been told to avoid.

1st – The danger of not being taught the whole truth.

This is true of churches who on account of their failure have led many into spiritual ignorance and eternal damnation. This has application to each one of us individually if we don't take the time to educate ourselves. On account of this a number of dangers come to mind.

- ❖ 1 – Lack of discernment
- ❖ 2 – On account of a lack of knowledge, we suffer from a lack of vision
- ❖ 3 – Ignorance is definitely a tool used by the devil
- ❖ 4 – It renders the individual powerless to witness
- ❖ 5- It affects our relationship with God.

2nd – The danger of not growing.

If we stop growing and maturing in the things of God, we will not only become stagnant, we will become weaker and less like to long for the things of God. Why is this dangerous for the Christian? Well, we will not reach our potential in Christ and will cease to be effective

witnesses. Sometimes, it may even mean, losing certain gifts that God has given us purely for His glory.

3rd – The danger of not separating.

Well that's an ecumenical danger! If we do not separate, then we will integrate. The Jewish nation who didn't separate as God instructed, they became defeated. That is the cost of compromise. If we don't separate from the world than we will integrate with the world and lose our identity in Christ.

So what is the solution? It is to believe and choose to grow. Make that choice. Sometimes we have to step out of our comfortable box, and be prepared to feel uncomfortable. It's like exercise, we need to stretch our minds and hearts, despite the pain. But let me encourage you, it is worth it for there are many treasures and blessings waiting for you.

Amen.