

Text: Hebrews 5:11-14

Title: Spiritual Regression (And How To Avoid It)

Date/Location: January 2, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

Through the human author of Hebrews, God now turns a magnifying glass on the audience. This is another of the warning and exhortation passages in Hebrews.

The exhortation arises because the subject matter about Melchizedek does not seem easy to convey.

11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

- A. Much to say refers to the subject of Melchizedek and Christ's high priesthood. It will take up all of chapters 7 and 8, and move into the issue of the new covenant and new mode of ministry in chapters 8, 9, and 10. It is a subject that is basically not considered elsewhere in the NT.
- B. The adjective **hard to explain** means "pert. to being difficult to tell the meaning of someth., hard to explain...'there is much to be said, and it is hard to explain' (as the context indicates, not because of the subject matter but because of a problem with the hearers)" (BDAG, s.v. "δυσερμήνευτος").
- C. The word for **dull hearing** can also be translated as lazy or sluggish or slow with respect to understanding or learning. This is not a comment on the decreasing auditory abilities of the audience, that is, that they need hearing aids for their physical hearing. This is a spiritual evaluation.
- D. They have "become" that way, which is a perfect active indicative. Some change in spiritual state happened at some time in the past and it has continuing ramifications up to the present time. The perfect tense is used again in 5:12 (you have come to need milk) and in 5:14 about those who have had their perceptions trained.

12a 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;

- A. With the passing of time, Christians should mature. They should mature so much as to be able to impart spiritual truth to others: their peers, their parents and grandparents, their children, young believers in the church, and so forth.
- B. These folks need teaching again. Re-teaching. Remedial education. They needed to again go over the basics of what God has revealed.
- C. A big lesson from this passage is that it is possible to lose ground in our spiritual life. These folks had gone in reverse. Somehow they have lost the basics, or at least lost sight of them so much that they effectively have lost them. Spiritual progress is not always upward. Sometimes there is a genuine regression.

In a sense, the best students are teachers. They want to learn so that they can pass it on to others. But something is wrong when those who should be teachers need basic teaching.

12b and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

A. Milk refers to the same idea as **first principles** of God's Word from verse 12. The elementary principles will come up again in chapter 6. Some are listed there.

Note that this milk is not the same as in 1 Peter 2:2.

B. Solid food refers to advanced teaching of God's Word. Solid food should not be hard—it is only hard if you have no teeth!

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

A. The word **unskilled** "pertains to lack of knowledge or capacity to do someth., unacquainted with, unaccustomed to" (BDAG, s.v. "ἄπειρος").

B. The acquaintance has to do with the word of righteousness. This phrase means the word or message about righteousness. It is easiest to bottom line this to "the Bible." It is the word of righteousness; it is where the oracles of God reside.

C. Someone who is a milk-level, baby Christian can be spotted based on their acquaintance with the Word of God.

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.

A. Full age refers to Christian maturity. Such people have been trained in the word of righteousness so they have discernment. This is again the perfect tense—they have worked on discernment and it has continuing results. They can sniff out what matches the word of righteousness (good) and what does not (evil).

B. Notice the connection between being unskilled in the word of righteousness and lack of discernment. Lack of use of our spiritual senses makes us unable to discern good and evil as well as we could if we are into the Word of God very diligently.

Conclusion

The best remedy against regression is progression. Keep on making progress. How?

1. Keep coming to as many meetings of the church as you possibly can. Sunday morning and evening are minimal. We need corporate prayers on Wednesdays and Saturdays, or some other time during the week.

2. Use the Bible reading program that we have started on Saturday. If you haven't been in the NT in a while, start with that. Both would be better. The time requirements are not too onerous just to read the text. It will mean you have to set something less important aside. Let's be realistic—if you are not reading the Bible regularly now, there *is* something less important that can be set aside.

3. Make time for prayer with your spouse and family.

4. Push yourself to get involved in a ministry at the church so you can put what you are learning to practical use. This will also help you become one who serves and not just one who sits.

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