

10. Understanding Why Some Christians Do Not Mature

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why Christ is compared to Melchizedek. We saw that Christ is greater than Aaron or any of his sons who served as the priests of Israel. We also saw that Christ can fully understand every temptation that we face because He faced those same temptations. The writer of Hebrews wanted to show that Christ is greater than all because He is the Son of God. In our topic today, we are going to see that many of the Hebrews found this difficult to understand because of a lack of spiritual maturity. Since there are also many Christians that have not grown to spiritual maturity today, our topic will help our children to understand why many do not grow to maturity so that they can help others mature.

Hebrews 5:8-11 says, “Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” The writer wanted to teach the Hebrews much more about the relationship of how the High-Priesthood of Christ was like Melchizedek but the writer found it difficult to help the Hebrews understand. As a result, Hebrews 5:11-6:12 goes on to explain the reason why they did not understand.

As Jews, the Christians to whom this book was originally written were all very familiar with the Old Testament and what it said about Melchizedek. However, that did not mean that they understood either what the Old Testament taught or what the apostles and others were now teaching about Christ. The reason is given in verse eleven. It was hard to explain these things because many of the Jewish Christians had become dull of hearing. The word translated “dull” means *sluggish* and is only used two times in the New Testament. The other use is in Hebrews 6:12 which says, “That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” This is the verse that concludes the section explaining why many Jews did not understand.

To be dull or sluggish in hearing means that a person can have something explained to him many times and still not understand. In verse thirteen, the writer calls the Hebrews babes. There are two words used for babes that we need to understand. In 1 Peter 2:2, we read, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” The word translated “babes (brephos)” in this verse speaks of a baby that is not yet born or one that has just been born. Here, in Hebrews 5:13, the word translated “babe (nepios)” speaks of a young child “a toddler” that cannot speak clearly. This word is used four times to talk about the spiritual life of believers in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, we read, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” In these verses, we see that spiritual toddlers are carnal or fleshly which means that their actions

were like those who were not even Christians yet. Those actions included envy, strife and divisions. The chapter goes on to teach the importance of building on the right foundation which is Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, we read, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” In this verse, we see that the word for spiritual toddlers is used five times. The talking of a toddler is childish and hard to understand. The understanding of a toddler is very limited. The thinking of a toddler is what will make them feel good now because they do not think about the future. In this chapter, we see that Paul is warning about selfishness and a lack of love and the chapter defines the meaning of godly love.

In Ephesians 4:14, we read, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” In this verse, we see that a spiritual toddler is tossed to and fro by every false teaching just like a tumbleweed that is blown by the wind. We also see that spiritual toddlers are easily deceived by false teachers. This verse is in the middle of the passage that talks about equipping the saints for ministry. We see that a Christian that grows to maturity and is equipped for ministry is able to speak the truth in love and carry out the ministry for which he or she is equipped.

The fourth use of the word for spiritual toddlers is here in Hebrews 5:11-14 that we are looking at in this topic. As we have said in verse 11, we see that a spiritual toddler is a Christian that has become dull of hearing. One reason why Christians may become dull of hearing is given in Hebrews 6:1-2 where we read, “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, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” If a Christian only hears passages about salvation and judgment, that Christian is being given nothing to help him grow to spiritual maturity. If no one has shown a new Christian how to study the Word of God and meditate on it, that Christian does not know how to feed himself spiritually.

Hebrews 5:12-14 gives us several other characteristics of spiritual toddlers. Those verses say, “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. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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.” First, we see that this letter was written to Christians that had been Christians long enough that they should have been able to teach others. Here, we are reminded that a Christian can be a Christian for a long time and fail to grow spiritually. A physical toddler has two favorite words – mine and no. A spiritual toddler has two favorite things that he thinks about – my needs and my problems. A Christian who fails to grow can still be focused on these two things many years later.

Second, a spiritual toddler needs someone to teach him again the first principles of the oracles of

God. The word translated “oracles” means *the very words of God*. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” As we teach our children to help them grow, we need to teach them the Word of God and how to apply the Word in their daily living and not just give them our own opinions or convictions.

Third, the writer of Hebrews said that the Hebrew Christians needed to be taught the milk of the Word because they were not yet equipped to understand the solid food of the Word. We saw earlier in this topic that those who are newborn babes because they have just become Christians need the milk of the Word to help them begin their spiritual growth. Here, we see that verse thirteen explains that a person that has been a Christian for a long time but has not grown spiritually partakes only of milk. Such a person only hears teaching on the things that make him feel good. As a result, such a Christian is unskilled in the word of righteousness. The word translated “unskilled” means *inexperienced or without experience*. The word which means the opposite is translated “trial” in Hebrews 11:36 where we read, “Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.” Many weak Christians are only taught the things that make them feel good instead of learning how to deal with tests, trials and tribulations.

The word that is translated “solid” in verse 14 means *something that stands firm*. In 1 Peter 5:8-9, we read, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” Here, the word is translated “steadfast”. We see that we resist Satan by being steadfast in the faith. The word translated “full age” means *brought to completion or to become mature*. Ephesians 4:12-13 says, “For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Here, the word is translated “perfect.” The primary ministry of the spiritual leaders mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is to equip the saints for the work of ministry and help them to become mature Christians.

We see that Christians that have grown to spiritual maturity have their senses developed so that they are able to recognize what is good and what is evil. This was the great need of many of the Hebrew Christians. A Christian that remains a spiritual toddler will not be able to help others grow spiritually because such a Christian has not grown to spiritual maturity himself. In contrast, the verses mentioned above show that a Christian that has grown to maturity has done so because he has built on the right foundation, he has learned to walk in love, he has been equipped to speak the truth in love and carry out the ministry that God has for him. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to grow in these ways so that they can help others grow also. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why some Christians do not mature.