

HEBREWS: THE INFINITE SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS CHRIST

VIII. Parenthetical Warning Against Turning From Christ, Hebrews 5:11-6:20

A. Warning Against Stunted Spiritual Growth

(Hebrews 5:11-14)

I. Introduction

- A. We live in an era of great need for an encouraging word amid man's discouraging spiritual failure, so a word from God on the infinite supremacy and sufficiency of His Son Jesus Christ is both desirable and fitting.
- B. The Epistle to the Hebrews offers it, and Hebrews 5:11-14 that is part of a parenthetical warning against turning from Christ warns against stunted spiritual growth in Christ. We view this passage for our insight:

II. Warning Against Stunted Spiritual Growth, Hebrews 5:11-14.

- A. The author's burden in the epistle is to show the infinite supremacy and sufficiency of Christ to a Judaistic cult to readers who were tempted to abandon Christianity for that cult. However, a key reason for this temptation was the readers' own stunted spiritual growth that had led them to be dissatisfied with the Christian faith.
- B. Accordingly, within an extended parenthetical section that warned the readers against turning from Christ, the author in Hebrews 5:11-14 addressed the cause and cure of stunted spiritual growth in his readers (as follows):
 1. The author wrote that he had much to say about Christ's high priestly ministry (Heb. 5:10), but that it was "difficult of explanation" (*dusermeneutos*, Thayer's Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1963, p. 160) for his readers since (*epei*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 283) they "had become" (*gegonate*, perfect tense of *ginomai*, "become," U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 756; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 76, 78-79) "sluggish" or "hard" (*nothros*, *Ibid.*, p. 549) of hearing, Hebrews 5:11.
 2. Indeed, when they ought to be teachers "according to the time" (*dia ton chronon*, *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 178-180), that is, due to the long time they had been exposed to the truth, they instead had need for one to teach them the "basic principles of the oracles of God," Hebrews 5:12a ESV. They "had become" (*gegonate* again, *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T.) in need of milk, not "solid food," Hebrews 5:12b ESV.
 3. The cause for this problem was the failure of the readers to apply the truths they knew, Hebrews 5:13-14:
 - a. Everyone who partakes of milk is "unacquainted with, unaccustomed to" (*apeiros*, *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 82) the Word of righteousness because he is a spiritual infant, Hebrews 5:13 NIV.
 - b. However, solid food is for the mature who by means of "exercise, practice" (*exis*, *Ibid.*, p. 275) have their "senses, faculties" (*aistheterion*, *Ibid.*, p. 24) "trained" (*gegumnasmena*, perf. pass. part. of *gumnazo*, "train," *Ibid.*, p. 166; *Ibid.*, The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 76) to distinguish good from evil, Hebrews 5:14 ESV.
 4. We can thus contrast the process of stunted spiritual growth with healthy spiritual growth (as follows):
 - a. The Process of Stunted Spiritual Growth: (i) A believer may not learn or he may not apply God's truth to life. (ii) If this occurs over time, a believer becomes sluggish in learning more truth. (iii) His sluggishness tempts him to be dissatisfied with the Christian faith and vulnerable to the lure to drift off into error.
 - b. The Process of Ongoing Spiritual Growth: (i) A believer over time may learn Scripture truths and apply them to his experience. (ii) In doing so, he learns to discern good from evil [what *especially* occurs as trials of persecution arise because he lives a godly life, 2 Timothy 3:12]. (iii) That discernment spurs the believer to learn and apply more truth for his edification [and healing from his trials of persecution], what in turn produces a continual series of cause-effect events in his life that keep on producing more growth.

Lesson: (1) *Believers who start to learn Scripture truths but who do not apply them in their lives in time will turn sluggish from absorbing more truths, and that in turn will stunt their spiritual growth and leave them dissatisfied with the Christian faith and open for the lure to turn to error.* (2) *However, believers who apply Scripture truth they hear will see the value of those truths equip them increasingly to discern good from evil in life, what will spur them to keep absorbing more spiritual truths and applying them for more discernment and eventual maturity.*

Application: (1) *May we not only be hearers of the Word of God, but applicers of it for our own vitality, James 1:22.* (2) *May we not think that spiritual maturity depends solely on how much Scripture truth we learn, for we can learn but not apply the truth, what over time leads to sluggishness in hearing and in our becoming open to being tempted to turn to error. [One can thus think he is not being "fed" God's Word when it is his own sluggishness of hearing the truth that is the problem for not having applied the truth he was already given!]* (3) *If we apply Scripture truth and live a godly life because of that application, and we are then persecuted for that application (2 Timothy 3:12), may we thank God for such suffering, for it drives us to learn more truths for healing, discernment and growth!*