

The Supremacy of the Savior: Studies in Hebrews

#12, “Overcoming Spiritual Apathy,” 5.11-14.

Some of the ones addressed in this letter who had confessed Christ as Savior (3.1; 4.14) were in danger of defecting from the Christian faith to return to Judaism. While persecution and social rejection were no doubt contributing factors, the author sees a deeper cause—spiritual dullness. This diagnosis could be made of a large majority of professing Christians today as can be witnessed by lack of toleration for and understanding of spiritual truth. What was true then is equally true today.

To overcome spiritual apathy we must identify it and then take the necessary steps to avoid it.

I. The description of spiritual apathy (vv.11-13).

- A. A lack of interest in deeper spiritual truth, v.11. The writer was having difficulty explaining the superiority of the priesthood of Christ because they had no ears to hear. Cf. today’s intolerance for such truths by so many!
 1. Christian maturity necessarily involves a grasp of some of the deeper truths of the faith.
 2. “Have become” is in the Perfect tense—a settled, continuing condition.
 3. “Dull,” *nōthros*, “no drive, no desire.” Translated “sluggish” in 6.12.
 4. Remember how “hearing,” *akoē*, is related to obedience, *hupakouō*, 5.9.
- B. The need to be taught the “ABC’s” of the faith rather than being able to teach others, v.12a.
 1. Notice that spiritual maturity is a process that takes time. A Christian can be *spiritual* from “Day One” but not mature for some time, and never completely.

“You are only young once, but you can stay immature indefinitely” is true spiritually as well.
 2. He is not saying every mature Christian should teach formally but that we should each be able to understand and communicate spiritual truth to younger believers.

Donald Guthrie, “The verb translated “ought” implies an obligation and not just a desired characteristic.”

3. The “first principles of the oracles of God” speak of the basic truths of Scripture (cf. **Acts 7.38; Rom 3.2**). Consider how few today can communicate these.

C. Intolerance for spiritual “meat,” **vv.12-13**.

1. This sad spiritual condition did not always characterize these believers. This is the same Greek verb and the same form as in **v.11** [Perfect tense], describing a present and continuing state.

2. “Need” goes beyond desire. They had regressed to a place where they had to have milk again! They had entered their second spiritual childhood!

1 Cor 3.1-2, “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.”

3. “Unskilled” is from a word meaning “lacking in experience or is ignorant of something.” *NASB*, “not accustomed to;” *HCSB*, “inexperienced.”
 - a. Like an infant (*nēpios*) who is unable to eat and digest anything but milk.
 - b. “The word of righteousness” here refers to the teaching about *true* righteousness that comes only through faith in Christ rather than via the Law.

II. The remedy for spiritual apathy (v.14).

- A. Deeper spiritual truths, described here as “solid food” as in **v.12**, is only “digestible” by those who are spiritually mature, *teleios*. Maturity does not mean “perfect.” Mature Christians keep growing!
- B. As noted in **v.12**, spiritual maturity takes time. Cf. **1 Tim 3.6**.
- C. Note the term “by reason of use,” i.e., through practice, *exercise*. **NIV**, “by constant use.”

1. The ability to digest spiritual truth requires the reading and study of Scripture and spiritual books; attendance at and attention to teaching!
 2. Like any other skill, such requires desire, time, and effort.
- D. The ability to digest spiritual truth also requires the ability to discern good and evil (*NLT*, “right and wrong”).
1. “Senses” speaks of our ability to discern. *ESV*, “powers of discernment.”
 2. “Exercised” is from *gumnazō*. This verb is also in the Perfect tense, indicating a complete and continuing reality. *NIV*, “Have trained themselves.”

What was true of these 1st Century Jews is sadly true of too many Christians today. And we have an abundance of church leaders and resources willing and eager to keep dispensing “milk” if it increases boosts attendance and increases profits.

But remember, we are commissioned to “make disciples” which involves “*maturing* the saints.” Read **Eph 4.11-16**. May we resist the siren song of pop Christianity and be found “so doing” when the Lord returns (**Mt 24.46**).