

# Be Strong

## Hebrews 5:11-14

### Dr. Paul Cannings

#### A. We Must Not Become Dull of Hearing (vs. 11-13):

1. Concerning him, we have much to say – The writer intelligently lays out many of his inner thoughts and feelings so that he can provide an intelligent account of how Christ would respond in a time of testing.
  - a) We have much to say about this, he began, referring to the subject of Jesus' Melchizedek priesthood. As it turned out, his subsequent discussion was indeed lengthy (7:1–10:18) as well as deep. Accordingly he anticipated that it would be hard to explain because his readers were slow to learn. They had been Christians a long time, he reminded them, so that by this time they ought to be teachers. Others who had been in the faith less time than they should be profiting from their instruction. Instead they needed someone to instruct them again in the basics.<sup>1</sup>
2. It is hard – Because of how these believers have responded to the suffering they have experienced (10:32-39), it has become difficult to explain what the writer needs to teach them. Knowing what to say was not the concern; it was more how to explain it.
  - a) The writer tells us that also in the words, “who were once enlightened” (6:4). The inability to apprehend was not a natural, inherent, and pardonable weakness, but a culpable incapacity which was the result of past neglect of and a gradual working away from New Testament truth (2:1–3). It was the hardening of the heart against the ministrations of the Holy Spirit (3:7, 8).<sup>2</sup>
  - b) Apparently the writer was personally acquainted with many Jewish believers who fit this description or had heard about their unwillingness to apply some of these important concepts about their faith.<sup>3</sup>
3. To explain, Tell, speak – These believers, who were once growing and maturing in Christ, have stagnated in their growth, making it continuously difficult for the writer who struggles to verbalize what he needs to teach them.

<sup>1</sup> Hodges, Z. C. (1985). [Hebrews](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 792). Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 10, p. 104). Eerdmans.

<sup>3</sup> Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#) (p. 1025). Tyndale.

4. Since you have become dull of hearing – It is difficult to explain, what was once easier to explain, because these believers have become lazy or sluggish in applying themselves to hearing and obeying God’s Word.
- a) Jonathan Edwards once preached a sermon on Heb 5:12 entitled: “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth.” He noted that the rebuke in the passage seems to include all the readers addressed in the epistle, that these believers had made no progress either doctrinally or experimentally, that they did not understand Melchisedek, and furthermore, what they should have known, they did not (*The Works of President Edwards*, IV, 1-15).<sup>4</sup>
  - b) Dull of hearing also means they wanted elementary teachings (6:1-2) that were more milky because they had lost their appetite for solid food.

**Translation.** *Concerning which (teaching, namely, that the Lord Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchisedec) there is much that we can say; yet when it comes to the saying of it, one finds it difficult to explain, because you are become those who are in a settled state of sluggishness, yes, of stupidity in your apprehension of the same.*<sup>5</sup>

5. Though by this time you ought to be teachers – Possibly two years had passed, and these believers were consumed with their struggles. The writer wants these believers to understand that they are obligated (13:7-9), even indebted to the Lord, to be continuously engaged in shaping the will of those who have turned their lives over to the Lord and are attending the church (10:23-26).
6. Though by this time you ought to be teachers – Because of everything the Lord God had done for the nation of Israel (totally impossible for them to accomplish for themselves), from the Old Testament to the New Testament, they should have felt indebted to the Lord to serve Him faithfully. They should have, by the time of the writing of this letter, become continuously engaged in theoretically and practically encouraging others in the scriptures so that they find strength.
- a) *By this time* – They were not recent converts.
7. You have need - What they continuously lack is very necessary. This is the very purpose of the letter. They cannot find this process as absolutely necessary, when the only power they have is the Word (4:12), and they are experiencing many severe issues (10:32-39).
8. You have need again for someone to teach you - Because their trials have continuously made them apathetic and even want to give up (10:35-39). The only power they have is

<sup>4</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Heb 5:11). Moody Press.

<sup>5</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 105). Eerdmans.

the Word of God; it has become necessary for someone skilled in master teaching to dedicate themselves to expounding the divine will of God to all of them.

- a) However, they had been lazy in their faith and needed someone to teach them again the basic things in the Scriptures. No wonder they were in danger of drifting (2:1)! Rather than explore and deepen their knowledge of Christ, rather than trying to please God with their actions, they considered abandoning Christ when they faced opposition.<sup>6</sup>

9. The Elementary principles – Their trials had depleted their spiritual growth process. It causes them to move from being mature believers (vs. 14) to children (6:1-3), creating a need for skilled teachers to have to skillfully integrate the first principles of Christian doctrine and lessons thought by Christ back into their lives. Some of these believers had retreated so far from the Word that even these skilled teachers could not bring them back (6:4-8).

- a) What he apparently had mainly in view was their wavering state of mind in regard to the error that sought to lure them away from the faith. If they were being urged, whether by sectarians or others, to abandon their Christian profession, then clearly this called into question the fundamental truths they should have been firm in.<sup>7</sup>

10. You have come to need – They have regressed (back to when they first got saved) in their spiritual walk, thus increasing the intensity of the trials, because He who is in them (1 John 4:4) was not operating at full mass. This causes them to want to give up (10:35-39), turning away from the Lord and creating the potential of them being in a state of apostasy. Example: The pressure of the road on tires, railroad tracks, potholes, and the heat of the tires can reduce the air in the tire. When a driver sees the gauge in the car, they must inflate the tires back up; otherwise, they will wear out faster. If the tires become flat and the person continues to drive the car, it can catch fire.

11. Solid food – ‘Solid food’ pertains to a person possessing all the Word it takes to remain firm in their faith, steadfast no matter the circumstances they may experience; their trials definitely mature them rather than defeat them. This is because their trials expose their faith (chapter 11) while protecting them against their weaknesses.

- a) *Solid food* is not indispensable for preserving life, but is so for acquiring strength. Especially as the Hebrews so venerated the minute details of the law, the unfolding of

<sup>6</sup> Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). [\*Life Application New Testament Commentary\*](#) (p. 1025). Tyndale.

<sup>7</sup> Hodges, Z. C. (1985). [Hebrews](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 792–793). Victor Books.

the Old Testament types of Christ and His High Priesthood was calculated much to strengthen them in the Christian faith. 13<sup>8</sup>

**Translation.** *In fact, when at this time you are under moral obligation to be teaching by reason of the extent of time (you have been under instruction), again you are in need of someone to be teaching you the rudimentary things of the very beginning in the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food.*<sup>9</sup>

12. For everyone who partakes only of milk - A believer who consistently, and habitually put themselves in a position, whether mentally or by choice of preachers only to receive a liquid diet of God's Word will not develop a life of faith (without faith there is no reward; 11:6). This is because the person does not have the substance to sustain them in trials and the Lord uses trials to mature them (James 1:2-4).

- a) Greek moralists also used "milk" and "solid food" figuratively, contrasting basic and advanced instruction. The "elementary principles" (NASB) or "elementary truths" (NIV) are the rudiments or basics (summarized in 6:1-2); Greek writers often applied the term to the alphabet. Some writers frequently reproved their readers in similar ways ("You should be teachers by now!") to stir them to learn what they should already know.<sup>10</sup>
- b) The writer continues his explanation in the words, "*For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.*" "Useth" has the idea of "has for his share in ordinary feeding." It refers to an exclusive diet of milk. Adults drink milk, but it is not their exclusive diet. "Unskillful" is from a Greek word that means "inexperienced."<sup>11</sup>

13. Accustomed to the word of righteousness - A person who has committed themselves to only milk is unskilled in the application of God's Word because they lack the true knowledge of the deeper meanings of the Word. When they encounter various circumstances, they lack the inner capacity to conform to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives because it is only through the application of God's Word our senses become trained (5:14). Instead of living out their faith, leading to righteousness, they respond in the flesh.

- a) The words "not acquainted" (*apeiros*) might be better rendered "inexperienced." It is not so much that a spiritual "infant" lacks information—though at first he obviously

<sup>8</sup> Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). [\*A Commentary. Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts-Revelation: Vol. VI\*](#) (p. 541). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

<sup>9</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [\*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader\*](#) (Vol. 10, p. 106). Eerdmans.

<sup>10</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). [\*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Heb 5:11-12). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>11</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [\*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader\*](#) (Vol. 10, pp. 106-107). Eerdmans.

does—but rather that he has not yet learned to put “the teaching about righteousness” to effective use. He lacks the skill which goes with maturity and which results in the ability to make appropriate moral choices. Such ability is exactly what is possessed by those who ... have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. That kind of person can handle solid food.<sup>12</sup>

14. For he is an infant – In chapter 4:12, the Word is what is powerful. Milky believers do not engage the Word or do not know how to apply it skillfully; therefore trials do not mature them because they are weak in the faith, lacking a righteous character, carnal, and spiritually immature.

**Translation.** *For everyone whose sole diet is milk is inexperienced in a message which is righteous in quality, for he is an (spiritually) immature person. But solid food belongs to those who are (spiritually) mature, to those who on account of long usage have their powers of perception exercised to the point where they are able to discriminate between both that which is good in character and that which is evil.*<sup>13</sup>

## B. Eat Well and Exercise Continuously (vs. 14; Romans 12:1):

1. Solid food is for the mature – Solid food is for the mature because this represents a believer who remains steadfast in living out their faith no matter what they encounter. This is a person who keeps the faith in an effort to accomplish all the goals God has set for their life, whether that is in their family, church family, their workplace or community. They are committed, like those in chapter 11 of this book, to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Christ would say, “I must be about My Father’s business.”
  - a) Solid food is required for the senses to be trained because, in order to discern good and evil, a believer must practice God’s Word.
2. Solid food is for the mature – This is the entire purpose of challenging these believers to faith. They must not allow their trials to sidetrack them so that they go back to Judaism to protect themselves from those who were attacking them (10:35-39) or forsake coming to church (10:25) because they have lost ‘confidence’ in the faith (10:19), are no longer

<sup>12</sup> Hodges, Z. C. (1985). [Hebrews](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 793). Victor Books.

<sup>13</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 10, p. 107). Eerdmans.

‘sincere’ about their faith (milky; 10:22), because they are wavering in their convictions (10:23) while refusing to encourage those who need to be ‘loved’ and do ‘good deeds.’ (10:24) If they were to continue in this manner, they would lack the capacity to skillfully (wisdom; Col. 1:9-12) apply God’s Word each day. They become infants, carnal believers. This is why being firm in the faith is for those who are steadfast in their commitment to grow in their faith. This creates an appetite for solid food, similar to those in chapter 11.

3. Solid food is for the mature – *“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”* (Col 1:28-29; NASU)

- a) The mere child puts into its mouth things hurtful and things nutritious, without *discrimination*; not so the adult. Paul warns them against being carried about by strange doctrines through not discriminating (ch. 13:9).<sup>14</sup>
- b) Spiritually mature Christians constantly examine themselves, turn away from sin, and learn what actions, thoughts, and attitudes will please God. Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). Life Application New Testament Commentary (p. 1025). Tyndale.

4. Who because of practice - These believers, for the sake of maturing in Christ, are purposeful to daily exercise their faith by applying the Word to everything they encounter each day.

- a) By contrast, those who are mature can handle “solid food,” because of their spiritual condition. The term translated by the niv with “constant use” (*hexis*) has been widely mistranslated and misinterpreted as referring to “exercise” or “practice” of one’s spiritual faculties. The term refers rather to the “condition” or “state” of the mature person. It is because of their mature condition that the mature have the faculties to discern good and evil.<sup>15</sup>

5. Have their senses trained - These believers who are committed to maturing in Christ are determinatively engaged in discipling their mind and their body to vigorously, based on the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, keep the faith no matter the circumstances with a view to godliness (Hebrews 12:4-12; 1 Tim. 4:7). *“but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”* (1 Cor. 9:27; NASU) They are like a gymnast who rigorously trains for the Olympics every day, no matter what their friends maybe doing or the pain they may experience.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). [\*A Commentary. Critical. Experimental. and Practical. on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation: Vol. VI\*](#) (pp. 541–542). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). [\*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation\*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 35). Zondervan.



- a) Once more the writer betrayed his concern about his readers' ability to reject the false ideas which confronted them. Had they been sufficiently mature they would be able to "distinguish" those ideas as "evil" over against the truths they should have known were "good." But he feared that this capability was not yet really theirs, though he would make every effort to instill it in them.<sup>16</sup>
6. To discern good and evil - Spiritual maturity empowers believers to be able to spiritually appraise what is acceptable before God (Phil. 1:9-11; excellent, blameless and righteous) and what is maliciously wicked with the intent to corrupt others.
- a) The ability to differentiate critically between good and bad, i.e. between truth and falsehood, was important to Greco-Roman writers in general, although the specific application to moral sensibilities is more often Jewish (2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9; Ezek 44:23). The writer borrows the language of Greek ethics, which would impress his Diaspora Jewish readers, and uses it to call them to study the Bible more thoroughly.<sup>17</sup>
7. To discern good and evil - A believer who is accustomed to the word of righteousness desires solid food because they are determined to discipline their mind and body to determinatively apply God's Word to every encounter so that they are: "*careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*" (Eph 5:15-16; NASU) They are more filled with the Spirit than controlled by the flesh.

**Translation.** *For everyone whose sole diet is milk is inexperienced in a message which is righteous in quality, for he is an (spiritually) immature person. But solid food belongs to those who are (spiritually) mature, to those who on account of long usage have their powers of perception exercised to the point where they are able to discriminate between both that which is good in character and that which is evil.*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Hodges, Z. C. (1985). [Hebrews](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 793). Victor Books.

<sup>17</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Heb 5:14). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>18</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 10, p. 107). Eerdmans.