

Weaning Ourselves

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I am writing this article at the beginning of 2023, a time when we make resolutions to improve the quality of our lives. Many of these resolutions have to do with our physical well-being – e.g., diet, exercise, and plastic surgery. But what about our SPIRITUAL well-being? Do we give much thought to that?

The anonymous writer of Hebrews was certainly concerned about the lack of spiritual progress he saw in the churches. And the problem was NOT with the teachers.

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14).

Ouch! I think the author was somewhat miffed at those people who had been in the church long enough to know the basic truths of Christianity **but then willfully stopped learning!** He wanted to build on that elementary foundation but couldn't because those people weren't prepared. You can't teach Algebra II to somebody that hasn't mastered Algebra I.

We think of stunted growth or arrested development in our bodies as a tragedy, whether physical or emotional – like achondroplasia, Rett syndrome, phobias or debilitating depression. But what about arrested spiritual growth? Is that not also a tragedy?

Just before the verses already quoted, the author of Hebrews wrote this about Jesus:

Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:8-10).

The author mentions Melchizedek in verse 10 and is about to compare Christ's ministry with Melchizedek's but sadly remembers that many of his hearers have not grown enough spiritually to “get it.” Therefore, he takes a detour starting in verse 11, and issues a warning to the spiritually immature, saying, "We have much to say about this [i.e., the way Melchizedek prefigures Christ], but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn."

Do you think that the author felt like he was essentially wasting his time on trying to teach people who weren't ready? Certainly, he says in verse 11, “*you no longer try to understand*” which makes it seem like those people weren't **incapable** of understanding, just **unwilling** to put in the effort.

If the author could see our churches today, would he have the same concerns?

- How many of us today think, “We’ve gone over all this before; I already know all this?”
- How many of us today think, “This teacher is uninspiring; I can’t learn anything from him?”
- How many of us today respond to different thoughts and interpretations with, “Well, that’s not what I was taught” - and stop listening?

Are we driven more by maintaining traditions than spiritual seeking, like the Judaizers in the early churches that insisted on maintaining Mosaic dietary restrictions and circumcision to be saved? The fact is, truth heard but not internalized and maintained will be lost to the hearer.

Jesus talks about this attitude in Matthew:

Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables:

***“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.***

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

***“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.***

*For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts*

and turn, and I would heal them.’ (Matthew 13:12-15)

Back at the beginning of chapter 6 in Hebrews, the author mentions the basics that form the scaffolding of Christianity. And now he wants to build on that scaffolding.

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so. (Hebrews 6:-1-3)

Putting his money where his mouth is, the author says, “Let’s not rehash the basics again – it’s time to move on to territory that you ought to have been covering already. Put down that milk bottle, then, and sit at the adult’s table like a big boy.”

Some people today call themselves Christians but haven’t really grasped the concept. A case in point concerns the evangelist D. L. Moody. Some of you might have heard of him.

As the account goes, Moody was once approached by a stumbling drunk on the street who slurred, “Mr. Moody, I’m one of your converts.” To which Moody replied, "You must be because you're certainly not one of the Lord's!

Christianity has basics, yes, but those basics, when **incorporated in our being**, stir a desire to know more about the Scriptures – not just to memorize more facts, not just to keep them in our head – but to ponder them in our hearts and allow them to inform our lives. Facts are finite, but the connections, concepts, the wonderment of it all create a lifelong desire to develop more deeply as a Christian.

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God. (Psalm 42:1)*

Bon appetit!