

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: **STUDIES IN HEBREWS**

Pastor/Teacher

Number: **3**

Text: **Heb. 5:11-6:3**

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THE ADMONITION AGAINST IMMATURITY

This is the third warning. The writer has just previously (5:10) begun the subject of the Melchizedek priesthood. It can easily be seen that the author has been building toward this theme (2:17; 3:1; 4:14-16) and having now introduced it, he abruptly interjects the third warning (5:11-6:20), which is graver than the two which have already been given. The writer will treat the Melchizedek priesthood in full in 7:1 to 10:18, but for now he directs his attention to the apathetic condition of the Hebrews.

I. **REBUKE FOR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY** (vv. 11-14)

A. **The Condition of the Hebrews**

1. **WE HAVE MUCH TO SAY AND IT IS HARD TO EXPLAIN.** Not because the writer didn't know what he was talking about, nor because the doctrine was cloaked in an unpenetrable mystery, but because he doubts their ability to understand and accept the doctrine. Westcott points out that this doctrine, Christ's Priesthood and Sacrifice, is the main and most difficult subject of the epistle.¹ The writer's part must be done; however, the Hebrews make it that much more difficult by their "Kindergarten maturity."²

NOTE: The writer was a concerned teacher. He cared about these Hebrew Christians enough to sternly rebuke them, so as to prompt them to action. Unlike some teachers who are only concerned with how they sound or with what kind of favorable impression they make on those who hear them, the writer to the Hebrews was a true teacher, concerned about those who heard him.

2. The problem with the Hebrews is one of being **DULL OF HEARING** (from Gk. *NOTHROS*, negative *NE* and *OTHEO*, to push; no push, in the hearing, slow and sluggish in mind as well as in the ears. In New Testament only here and 6:12 (slack, sluggish). Plato calls some students *NOTHROI* (stupid).³ It means slow moving in mind, torpid in understanding, dull of hearing, witlessly forgetful. It can be used of the numbed limbs of an animal which is ill. It can be used of a person who has the imperceptive nature of a stone.⁴

NOTE: The stress on **HEARING** in this epistle. Hearing must also involve obedience. ... Three times (3:7, 15; 4:7) Psalm 95 is quoted; "O that today you hearken to His voice" (RSV), and context makes it clear that hearkening means obeying.⁵ The Hebrews were now in this condition. They **HAVE BECOME** (Moffatt: "You have grown...")⁶ "by default," points out Hughes, "the implication being that this was not the case with them originally. They have become slack, and their slackness had affected their attentiveness and capacity to receive and retain solid instruction."⁷ They no longer responded to the Word of God, but like children, something else had captured their attention.

3. **BY THIS TIME YOU OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS** (not spiritual gift), being able to give a reason for the hope in them (I Pet. 3:15), able to understand the doctrines of the Word of God, and instruct younger believers. But they **NEED AGAIN...**"The habit," says John Brown, "of spiritual dullness of hearing not only prevents progress, but it absolutely produces retrogression."⁸

B. **The Remedy Prescribed**

The Hebrews need **SOMEONE TO TEACH YOU THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES** (Gk. *STOICHEIA*, means literally ... "ABC's" ... and carries the reproachful implication that those who

are being addressed need to start again not even at chapter one, but, as it were, with the elements of the alphabet that precede chapter one.⁹)

QUESTION: What are the ABC's? These are what the Hebrews need. They are referred to as MILK in contrast to SOLID FOOD.

ANSWER: In 6:1 the ABC's are called THE ELEMENTARY TEACHING ABOUT CHRIST "from which," says Hughes, "the readers are being exhorted to advance, may best be understood as referring to the first simple presentation of the gospel message."¹⁰ (This will be more fully dealt with later in this series)

They were NOT ACCUSTOMED (Gk. *APEIROS*, without experience) TO THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. According to Hughes, this should be understood in a "theological sense, so that 'the word of righteousness' indicates the teaching about righteousness which is fundamental to the Christian faith, namely, the insistence on Christ as our righteousness (I Cor. 1:30; cf. II Cor. 5:21) as opposed to self-righteousness or works-righteousness (cf. Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:5; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:21ff; Lk. 18:9ff).¹¹ FOR HE IS A BABE (not the Gk. Word for child, *TEKNON*, but the word for an infant, *NEPIOS*, according to Robertson this is like the Latin *INFANS*, infant, not able to talk.¹²) But the MATURE, those who HAVE THEIR SENSES TRAINED (Gk. *GEGUMNASMEN*, to exercise, our word "Gymnasium" is derived from this word) to tell the difference between GOOD AND EVIL, this, says Hughes, "should not be understood merely in an ethical sense...but more particularly, as the context requires, in a comprehensive theological sense, namely of good and evil, or true and false, doctrine, which would include moral teaching."¹³

CONCLUSION: Ignorance of what the Bible teaches is the root of all error and spiritual decay. "God requires of those who live under the dispensation of the gospel," wrote the Puritan giant, John Owen, "that they should be skillful in the word of righteousness. To be skillful is to have a spiritual sense, taste, or relish, of the goodness, sweetness, useful excellency of the truths of the gospel, endearing our hearts to God, and causing us to adhere unto him with delight and constancy."¹⁴

Endnotes

¹ B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle To The Hebrews* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1972) p. 132

² P.E. Hughes, *The Epistle To The Hebrews* Eerdmans, 1974) p. 190

³ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in The New Testament V* (Eerdmans, 1937.) p. 371

⁴ Wm. Barclay *Hebrews* (Westminster Press, 1957) p. 49

⁵ H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1976) p. 170

⁶ James Moffett, *Commentary on Hebrews* (T & T Clark, 1975) p. 69.

⁷ Hughes *op. cit.* p.189

⁸ John Brown, *Exposition of Hebrews* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1980) p. 265

⁹ Hughes, *op. cit.* p. 190

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 195

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 191

¹² Robertson, *op. cit.* p. 371

¹³ Hughes, *op. cit.* p. 193

¹⁴ *The Works of John Owen XX* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1991) p. 89