

Back to the Bottle



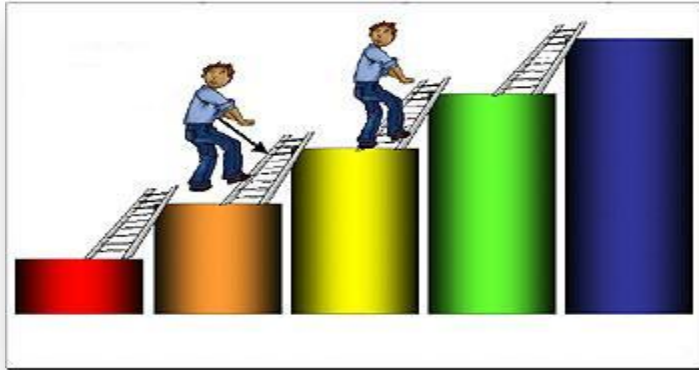
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Hebrews 5:11-14

There is something wrong with many Christians today, and it is something that has plagued the Christian church from its inception. Not that there is anything wrong with Christianity, or Christ, but with people failing to mature and also others who ought to know better falling prey to deception so easily. It is amazing to me that some people never seem to change and obvious poison is swallowed up like candy.

Of course, this has happened to me in the past, and sometimes deception can be well disguised, but we are supposed to become more discerning as we grow in Christ, and if we are not, then it is a sign that we are not as mature as we may think we are, and are therefore ripe for even more deception, distraction, and a growing lack of discernment. The truth is that we will either push forward in the truth or we will be pulled back from it. Those that think they can get away with standing still are falling back and don't even know it. You will either be increasing in your concentration on

Christ, or the world. You either move on to maturity or you stay in perpetual adolescence at best, wasting years of time.



The background to this text is that we are looking at two sets of people: one who had fallen away, and another who were looking back. The writer to the Hebrews was warning the others that they needed to

move on, and that they must break away from those who were wavering and wandering if they did not come with them. It was decision time, and time to look and live forward and stop looking back, and those who were looking forward were being told that they must eventually separate from those who won't separate from the apostates.

So we have three camps forming: one who had definitely fallen away, and weren't coming back, one who were moving forward, being told not to look back, and the third, in the middle, standing still. This third camp is the people who were not getting it; they had become dull of hearing, not with their ears, but with their heart, and they were in danger.

You will wind up in one camp or another and the problem is many think they don't have to make a choice. They are already saved and have made the choice, but when the tests come to see if they are truly believers, they will eventually fall back into the camp they never really came out of in the first

place. They were like Lot's wife; her heart never really left Sodom and Gomorrah. This applies very easily to us today.

They had been suffering under persecution and some had departed and went back to Judaism, because it was easier. Now these others were being warned that they should not even be considering going back, that they needed to separate from those who had because they weren't coming back to Christ again, and that these that had remained but who were wavering had better get on the ball and get learning and discerning and stop thinking that Christianity was the way out of suffering but that it was the way to see through it.

Were they going to have faith and move on into Christ or fall back into their old, more comfortable position? This was the question, and the way to do it right was to keep growing. You've been blessed; don't look back.



Our Savior is greater than our suffering. Those who had fallen back were compared to those who wouldn't move forward at Kadesh-barnea, and the writer is saying that the reason you keep looking back is that you have not moved forward in your understanding of the superiority of Christ, who is easily worth having to deal with anything we have to while on this earth.

The question remains today: when the chips are down will we want to have our comfort, or will we take on the giants even when no one else is coming with us, do we trust Christ? For those that are maturing the answer is a lot easier than for those who don't understand the character of God.

Our bulletin banner and the end of our Mission Statement is 1 Corinthians 10:31 – *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*. Whatever we do had ought to reflect who He is, but when we only understand that superficially, it only takes superficial things to knock us down, keep us down, or turn us away.

We know He is almighty but we need to understand HOW He is the most and all mighty, why He is the way He is, what His plans and promises are. When we can truly see His radiance everything else looks dull. We say we understand that but we don't practice ourselves to further understand that.

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They were dull because they saw Christ as dull, not as bright as He truly is, that is why the writer wanted to go on to understand the perfections of Christ but they weren't even ready for that yet, they were worrying about their friends first.

Yes we should be concerned about our unsaved friends, big time, but these were friends who had been in the camp and then turned away and were enticing them to turn away also. They were not really friends but frauds, and it was time to move forward not fall back. They cannot take the others with them and they cannot wait around for them.

There comes a time and it is when they are influencing you more than you are influencing them. When in doubt the time has run out. If you continue to move forward you will see them fall away anyway, don't stop moving toward

God and godliness. You've been blessed; don't look back. You have to make a choice; standing still isn't a choice.

Christians must grow; they become disciples or deserters. They weren't learning (vs.11), they weren't skilled (vs.12-13) and they weren't developed (vs.14). It is no wonder they were having trouble. It is no wonder some stay still or fall back because they haven't grown up! Staying still is not really an option because those who have fallen back will beckon you back, and situations will only make it worse. We can fail to discern that we are falling

back, we will just move on not forward, avoiding trouble as best we can, but we aren't as smart as we think we are, and we are in trouble, and we will see blessing and suffering in the wrong way.

Why People Fail to Discern

**Problem with Submission
(vs.11)**

Problem with Study (vs.11)

Problem with Slippage (vs.12)

Problem with Skills (vs.13)

**Problem with Swallowing
(vs.14)**

Vs.11 – *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

About this refers to the priesthood of Melchizedek (vs.6, 10 / Genesis 14 / Psalm 110:4) and how it related to Christ, this is what he was about to discuss. He had just discussed Christ as the Great High Priest and how He was called of God like any true man of God is, and he was about to go into just how superior Christ was than all the other priests before Him.

Now before he goes into this meaty subject there is a sort of parenthesis here from 5:11-6:20. This is a sort of side thought, telling them of where

they were at spiritually. The writer is taking stock of their situation and telling them they are not mature enough, and why they are having this problem in the first place. They haven't advanced in Christ as much as they should have. This didn't mean mystical experience but understanding God's Word and thereby His character, His way. They should have been solid but they were falling apart, like many today.

Growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, discovering just how supreme and loving and available He is to us, this is what guards us from error and fads and frauds when we feel the weight of suffering or persecution and the pull of the popular opinion, whether that be in the religious world, our family, our church, or whatever. The way to keep discerning is to keep on learning. You cannot rest on your laurels and rest in Christ at the same time.

Now I am not going to say Christian counseling is wrong, but I do think we see that something is wrong when we have so many people who call themselves Christians needing or looking to be "counseled".

Why do so many Christians need counseling today? Why do so many stay immature? This text gives us a clue.

When we are naïve we fail to grasp important issues. These Hebrew Christians were not able to make the distinction between what scripture taught and what they felt was right or what the tradition they were leaning on said. This was about the primacy of the scriptures in theirs and of course our lives in practice not just theoretically (Hebrews 4:12). The Melchizedek



priesthood was not of tradition at all only a scriptural matter. There was no Melchizedek priesthood to the Jews, and so they would have to rely on scriptural precept relating to Christ in practice alone. Even though this was only mentioned briefly before, this verse says, basically, “of which we have much word” (logos). No familiar tradition to lean on “just in case”. It was something different than what they had learned before. Many are simply looking for affirmation of what they already know and believe. They are looking to be reinforced in their best intentions, not looking to see God’s ways. It is no wonder we see so many “problems” with Christians today.

This is the way it is with people. You see the Bible isn’t just a new set of moral rules we already know about, it is a whole new way of thinking, and His thoughts are not our natural thoughts, not our best intentions. We need to be renewed in our minds or we won’t get it, and many never do get it. Now there are a lot of religious traditions and denominations, but the issue is not about which system has the best morals or seems to be the most loving, the issue is “What do the scriptures say?” The truth is the issue.

People don’t want to break away from old patterns because they may have a grain of truth and they provide a measure of comfort. They are trying to cope yet they give themselves no hope. Something other than scripture holds the weight of authority over them. This is why every new book, new fad

How to Learn to Discern

Stop Turning Your Head
(vs.11)

Start Turning the Pages
(vs.11)

Training Before Teaching
(vs.12, 14)

Learn to Drink the Milk
(vs.13)

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect
(vs.14)

or old fraud sends them into a frenzy or tizzy. This is why we need to make the commitment to scripture beforehand. Please refer back to our sermon “Bible Brainwashing” and now realize how important this is. People don’t actually yield their will to the authority of scripture; they don’t submit their hearts. They don’t have faith. They don’t trust God. They don’t trust the truth.

So the first problem is submission.

Some things are *hard to explain* (interpret or translate), because they don’t know the language. The writer was going to compare scripture with



scripture and show them the superiority of Christ through this Melchizedek. This would require effort and thought, and they weren’t quite ready for it. It is like a first day apprentice who doesn’t know the trade; they have to know and learn to use the tools before they become truly effective. Or like a professional who has to acquire continuing education credits to keep their license.

Now there is a reason they don’t move in to more trust: lack of submission leads to spiritual dullness. They have *become* dull of hearing. **The second problem is study.** They have *become* slothful and sluggish (same word as in Hebrews 6:12) in study – not only lazy but slow even when they aren’t.

Now we are talking about being spiritually slow, and that is not a function of the intellect. Feasting on God's Word is not first an intellectual challenge; it is first a moral challenge of the will. Will you submit your will to God? Will

you be willing to obey what the scriptures teach? If so, will you search and study the scriptures? If you do, then you will learn, grow, and understand.

The pathway to maturity and to solid biblical food is not first becoming an intelligent person, but becoming an obedient person. The real path to obedience is not outward conformity but submitting your will. Then you concentrate on your target by studying the scriptures, and no matter your intellect, your spiritual senses will become more and more attuned to Christ. Jesus has run the path before us (Hebrews 6:19), and He is the key to staying on the path, to keep looking at the One ahead of us, so we don't lose our way.

Most think that intellectual development is the key to maturity, but this text



tells us that isn't the truth. This is actually obvious even from the everyday unbelieving world. How many smart people do stupid things? How many who have it all still slip and fall? How many people who are geniuses also become madmen? How many children do you know who can overwhelm you

with their knowledge of technology but they cannot even handle fifty dollars without it burning a hole in their pockets?

Some are unlearned because they won't be taught. They won't submit themselves to study or to be taught by those who have studied. This is often the case with many who have authority issues and yet don't study for themselves. They just go by their feelings but their feelings, their "powers of discernment" aren't developed; their skill is like a monkey with a machine gun. Only through experience have they learned anything, and it is not

enough. Experience can be good if biblically understood. We need to study and then experience will teach us more precisely. Then our learning processes will speed up.

The way people often learn is flawed, faulty, foolish, and it wastes time, effort, and effectiveness. When your head is turned you cannot hear; you can hear the sound but not the substance because you aren't paying attention. Who are you fellowshiping with, which camp has your attention, what has you turning your head? If you aren't turning the pages of the Bible, something else will turn you away from it.



So this first verse says that there is much to learn from the Word of God, the Bible, but too often we don't give it the due diligence it requires, we let it go and become slothful and stagnant.

Now someone can have intelligence but not be learning. Someone can be smart but not skilled. Someone can be doing but not be developed. This is not simply about biblical knowledge but obedience faith (trust). 2 Peter 3:18 – this is not simply a call to be more studious but more serious. It is a call to surrender control and submit to study. **It does take BOTH to grow.**

In the Pastoral Epistles, Timothy was instructed to pass along what he had learned, a fully orbed faith. It was not just doctrines of facts and figures. Instead he was given instructions on how to recognize those who had learned.

We must be doers not simply hearers of the Word but we cannot be doers if we are not hearers. Otherwise our doing may just be doing what we think is right but it is wrong. Now it is about becoming skilled but it is a matter of

will before it is a matter of skill, and if you get the order wrong you will be out of order, which we see so often with people who know a whole lot of Bible but are a whole lot of ungodly. This isn't an excuse for the rest of us to not study.

Vs.12-13 – *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*

Now the problem becomes slippage.

We have to go back to basics because people become sluggish. People forget what they know: Use it or lose it. Their spiritual life is slow, even though they may have lots of entertainment and excitement



about it. They might have advanced before but they have gone backward (same word in vs.11-12). Not everyone is called to be a teacher in church, but everyone in church is supposed to be teaching, we ought to help others grow, to explain things to spouses, children, younger people, unbelievers, etc., etc. (cf. Titus 2). After all this time they ought to be able to teach but they have become unteachable.

The truth is that this is why some people need to be at every revival or happening or conference or anything that mentions God and is exciting. It is because their spiritual, and you could say scriptural life, is actually slow,

sluggish, it has no push, no strength, and they have been deceived into thinking activity is spirituality, that excitement is empowerment. They want an experience they don't want to exercise, and so they need to be re-taught again and again.

Their spiritual ears had become dull. Their maturity level had sunk to a milk only diet. The Bible was becoming uninteresting. Things of the world were becoming more exciting and attractive than the Word of God and the greatness of His salvation. They are drifting instead of rowing against the

current of sin, and that means drifting backward toward destruction. They weren't learning, they weren't discerning, they weren't skilled, and they were self-willed.



You need to handle the bread and milk before you try and eat the meat, it is for the mature, those that aren't will mess up with the meat, they will choke, and you don't feed a one year old a steak. The problem is that they are unskilled,

they stay babies, or they reverted back, because they are not exercising with the milk they have. People want to go from toddler to titan without even knowing or living what the Bible teaches. That makes growth based on them not God, they act the part, they get a lot of superficial knowledge and can maybe quote a lot of verses or perhaps they can even teach, but there is something missing, and they will fall when tested. A giant baby is still a baby. It hasn't cut its teeth, and it needs milk. Milk produces righteousness

and then you are ready for meat when you become skilled by practicing and can discern truth.

So the path to becoming more discerning, to becoming mature, to being able to handle the Word of God and sense when something's a fraud is not to jump from milk to meat, but to learn how to drink the milk. Even then you are still not supposed to be teaching some deep truth yet. You apply yourself, stop being lazy, stop thinking you've heard this before, stop thinking you know it all, stop thinking you are ready for meat, stop looking back, start exercising what you know, submit your will, become obedient, practice, become skilled. Learn to eat the food on the table, and stop dropping it off your plate onto the floor and waiting for the goodies. You don't recognize how good what you have already is, and when you do, then you will grow from that instead of thinking it isn't enough, and then you will become mature.

Vs.14 – *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

The mature know what to look for; they know what to swallow, unlike a child who will swallow anything and everything it can get its hands on. The baby just wants an experience of what this or that tastes like. They haven't been trained yet. Their senses are wired for "now" and they aren't ready to decide what they eat yet without getting hurt.



This is talking about decisions that are not laid down specifically in a list. If you are mature you can know God's will without some list. You see the devil is a liar and he knows how to take something and package it so that it does not look or smell or even taste like poison. The label doesn't exactly match some explicit warning in scripture, and for those who are untrained they don't know how to discern by using the scope and sweep of scripture. You don't need a proof text to have proof that the devil is at work. If you know God's character by having been trained in God's Word then you will



know if God is at work or not. Don't assume you do. Too many Christians are babies playing around with poison thinking they know God better than they do.

By reason of use (KJV) they practice until they are trained, which means constantly doing it, but they have learned to do it with the milk first. Then they have matured to the major leagues. They have become productive, fruitful in every good work, and the fruit isn't poisoned.

This does bring up an interesting question, because there are people who read the Word every day, they apply themselves, they teach others, and live what many would call obedient lives, but they still fall for every fad and fraud that comes down the pike. Why? They don't practice their discernment

skills, and then they think that meat is something other than it is. They think they have a handle on it all. They aren't so much looking to be trained as they are looking to teach, and they actually need to be taught again.



Just because someone teaches kids math in elementary school doesn't mean they don't need to keep doing advanced math on their own. If they stay put mentally they will regress back. People may seem obedient compared to others, but what about where God is trying to take them, are they submitted to that? To whom much is given much is required. I confess this is a big area for me in my spiritual life; I can't just compare myself with everybody else. Neither can you.

Now, ask yourself this: Does this give any instruction for how we should deal with ourselves, as we strive to grow in Christ? Does it give any instruction as to how we might deal with others whom we disciple? Discipleship requires effort, physical, mental, spiritual. Grace is not opposed to effort. The opposite of grace is not effort, but merit. We need to recognize that we need to give the effort. We need to recognize that God is demanding an effort. We need to demand effort from those we disciple. Instead of taking the easy road or looking for the microwave miracle, we need to heed the biblical message and methods. There may be episodes of great movement in short amounts of time, but the key is to keep moving all the time. No pain no gain.

We need to become mature in our learning or we will just waste our time. We need less trial and error and more trial and triumph. We can pass the tests if we will submit to the teacher. The best way to prepare for the trials of tomorrow is to live like they were here today. I am not talking about worrying; I am talking about focus.

Practice makes perfect (*telios* means mature, complete, perfect). Now it is not really just practice makes perfect but perfect practice makes perfect (example). They have learned to handle meat because they have learned to



handle milk, they have become mature, skilled, and they practice, they know how to grow, they exercise their judgment and know how to

exercise judgment. They have learned to discern.

One true and first test of discernment is that godliness leads to discipline and diligence (2 Peter 1:5, 10 – eagerness and earnestness, which implies effort to be speedy) and if not it is deception. Godliness wants to be godlier it exercises (trained, our root word for gymnasium) their senses, their perception; their judgment is exercised that is why they can exercise judgment. Learning leads to maturity, and mature learning makes for mature discerning.

When we are immature, the truth becomes a toy, when you have something but don't know what it is really for, you don't know how to properly use it. They are unskilled and unproductive. Those that won't discern will not be able to apply the truth or they will turn truth into lies, and take something advanced to advance their own agenda.

We must concentrate on Christ. Why is this so hard? Because your natural instinct is to turn to yourself, instead of to Jesus. That is why we want moral exhortations rather than true grace, we want steps, programs, formulas, and things like that because we want to be able to use God to get things right rather than actually trust Him with controlling it all. You see we can even give it all to Him and yet still be in control of it, we sort of loan Him the leadership of our lives, and then snatch it back when we feel threatened, persecuted, frustrated, or that we are suffering too much. We say, "Wait a minute, this isn't going right, you are doing it wrong, or I can do a better job, or you are missing something". We want results but He wants a deeper relationship. God is able to change your instinctive patterns without you having to jump through hoops. It will take real work, not cookie cutter formulas, but real fellowship, and this is what good relationships are all about. If we will submit to His will and commit to study, then God will use our own experiences to teach us more precisely, we will learn to discern.

When you are facing hard or disappointing circumstances, boredom, loneliness, money problems, fighting with a spouse, distance from a friend, it's easy (and instinctive) to turn, and we think we are trusting God but we are only turning to ourselves many times. You need to go to God, He hears you, but will you hear Him, from His Word? God gets better, He gets brighter as you trust Him and are able to see Him through the circumstances. That is how He shows His brilliance. He can shine when nothing else can. I hope you can learn to discern that. You can over time if you are willing to do what it takes to become mature. Perfect practice makes perfect.