The Supremacy of The Son of God

Studies in Hebrews

22)The third warning (part 1) Heb. 5:11-14

**Hebrews 5:10-14**10 called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Outlines:

A. Christ is **Superior to the Prophets** (1:1-3)

B. Christ is **Superior to the Angels** (1:4–2:18)

C. Christ is **Superior to Moses** (3:1–4:16)

            D. Christ is **Superior to Aaron** (5:1-10:18)

1. **Superior High Priest** (5:1-7-28)

a. The Priesthood of Aaron vs Christ (5:1-10)

Third Warning: Don’t Degenerate (5:11–6:20)

1) The Rebuke for Immaturity (5:11-14)

2) The Encouragement toward Maturity (6:1-3)

3) The Warning against Apostasy (6:4-8)

4) Reminder of the Promises of God (6:9-20)

b. The Priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

2. **Superior Priesthood** (8:1-10:18)

**v 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

No sooner has he begun his exposition of the high priesthood of Christ than he remembers the spiritual condition of his readers. They are dull and sluggish Christians who have gone back to the most elementary teaching559.

“**we have much to say**”  The author of Hebrews is preparing the community for the development of the subject announced in vv 9–10, the writer formally declares his intention to treat it fully which he did in **7:1-28560**.

The adjective δυσερμήνευτος, “**hard to explain**,” occurs only here in the Greek Bible. Among hellenistic writers it is used uniformly to describe a difficulty **intrinsic** to the material to be expounded and not extrinsic to it, i.e., a difficulty that derives from the complexity of the matter rather than the lack of skill in the writer or his audience561.

The major problem, however, is with the readers. The author says, “**You have become dull of hearing.”** The Greek verb tense (“have become”) suggests that the readers were not always like this. The problem is not constitutional, i.e., it is not what they are by nature. Rather, it is dispositional. They are spiritually sluggish or lazy (“dull of hearing”). Their capacity to understand spiritual truth has been blunted and dulled. **They are responsible for their present condition, and the author blames them**562.

The reason it was necessary to alert the readers to the importance of the announced subject is that they have become νωθροὶ ταῖς ἀκοαῖς, **“sluggish in understanding” or “hard of hearing.”** The **choice of terms is significant in the context of v 9, where Jesus was designated “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”** (τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν). Deafness or dullness in receptivity is a dangerous condition for those who have been called to radical obedience. The importance of responsible listening has been stressed repeatedly in the sermon563

**2:1**, “we must pay the closest attention to what we have heard” [τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσιν]

**3:7b–8a, 15; 4:7b** *“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,*

**4:2** For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

The warning of Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is one of the most contested passages in the scriptures with great theological ramifications on the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer. The adjective nōthros is important to our evaluation of this whole unit (5:11-6:12), since it occurs only one other time in the New Testament and that is in Heb 6:12. What we have, then, is an inclusio with nōthros marking **the beginning and ending** points of the subunit.

5**:11 “you are dull/sluggish of hearing”**

**6:12 “that you might not be sluggish (nōthroi), but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”**

Within this inclusio, the author will confront them about their immaturity, exhort them to mature, warn them about failure to do so, and finally encourage them that he has high hopes for them—even that they might “inherit the promises.”564

In the NT νωθρός occurs only in Hb. In 5:11 the author tells the readers that he cannot lead them, as he would like, into the profundities of Christian theological knowledge. This is because their inward capacity to receive is blunted and dulled. They have become νωθροὶ ταῖς ἀκοαῖς, sluggish in hearing and receptivity. This is connected with the fact that the recipients of the epistle do not have the vitality of assured and persevering faith. This spiritual exhaustion, which is due to deficient confidence of hope in the future time of consummation, makes them νωθροί, 6:12. Thus the word expresses a twofold deficiency which is no true part of the Christian life: a lack of receptivity for Christian *gnosis*, and a stale, exhausted spirit instead of the glowing joy of hope. When Christian life shows exhaustion both in breathing in (hearing and receiving) and in breathing out (believing confidence in the future), the author of Hb. calls his readers νωθροί565.

**v 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.**

The author says to them, “By this time you ought to be teachers.” The phrase “**by this time**” means the period that had passed since they became Christians. He is saying that a sufficient interval of time had passed since their conversion for them to have become well grounded in the faith. Yet they were not mature. **The author is here telling us two very important lessons of the Christian life:**

1. God expects His people to make progress in spiritual things.

2. Time alone does not produce spiritual maturity! There are many believers who have been converted to Christ for a considerable period of time. Yet they are spiritually immature566.

They ought to be διδάσκαλοι, “**teachers**,” which refers specifically to an ability to communicate the faith to others567. **One evidence that someone is a mature believer is that he or she can explain his or her faith to others** (see 1 Peter 3:15)568.

the word “**again**” was a reminder that someone had already indeed taught them the basics of Christianity, the “elementary principles of the oracles of God.”569

The Greek word translated “**first principles**” refers to things in a series like the letters of the alphabet. The readers need to be taught “the ABCs of God’s oracles” (cf. NEB). They need someone to review with them “the elementary truths” (NIV) of the faith.570

**The Scriptures provide two kinds of food, “milk” and “solid food.”** The term milk refers to the kind of elementary instruction in the Scriptures that is suitable for the new believer (see 1 Peter 2:2). The term solid food suggests the nourishment of adults that is not readily digested by infants. For babies lighter fluid food is appropriate571.

**13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.**

**There is nothing wrong with being an infant (nēpios), but there is plenty wrong with remaining an infant572**.

**“unskilled**” ἄπειρος apeiros "**without experience**" (a, negative, peira, "a trial, experiment"), is used in Hbr 5:13, RV, "without experience," AV, "unskillful," with reference to "the word of righteousness." In the Sept., Num 14:23, of youths; Jer 2:6, of a land, "untried;" Zec 11:15, of a shepherd573.

The expression “**word of righteousness**” (lougou dikaiosunēs) has been variously interpreted. The phrase could be translated “the Word for righteousness.” In this case, the author would have in mind the intended outcome that growing in the Word should provide. Such an understanding would have a natural connection with chapter twelve, where “training” that comes by way of God’s discipline enables believers to share in God’s holiness and righteousness [note especially Heb 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained (γυμνάζω gymnazō compare to v 14 their senses exercised) by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη dikaiosynē compare to v 13 the word of righteousness)574. That also reminds us of the words of Paul **2 Timothy 3:16** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”

**v 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

In **contrast** to the child (v 13), the τέλειοι, “adults,” are those who are prepared for στερεὰ τροφή, “solid food” (v 14). In this context, “solid food” must have reference to the actual instruction about the high priestly office of Christ provided in 7:1–10:18575.

The Greek word for “**full age**” is τέλειος teleios which is usually translated “**perfect”** in the book of Hebrews576. The author of Hebrews tells us that those who are “perfect” or “mature” are those “**who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**”

**The formulation of v 14*b* seems to imply a capacity for spiritual discrimination and not simply moral discernment**. The period of time contemplated in v 12 (διὰ τὸν χρόνον, “by this time”) has provided the community with the opportunity to achieve a condition of moral and spiritual maturity that makes them capable of sound discrimination577. **It is fair to assume that discerning both good and evil is applied to both conduct and doctrine.** In their conduct they allow the word of righteousness to control every aspect of their lives and they exhibit the radical obedience that Jesus himself exhibited toward the Father. They also discern good from evil in doctrine and knowledge of the scripture that is why they are able to digest “sold food.”

The idea of stressful “training” is suggested by the word gumnazō (from which we get our English word gymnasium), meaning to exercise or train578.

Notice that reaching spiritual maturity is by “**reason of use have their senses exercised**” in other words, it is the individual believer’s responsibility to know and obey the “word of righteousness.”  The author of Hebrews is telling us that **each believer** must examine every conduct and every doctrine against the word of righteousness and ultimately obey God’s word only. **It is only through that repeating exercise of both knowing and obeying God’s word that a person can reach spiritual maturity and perfection**.

Note how the sign of maturity is to have “**their senses exercised**" which stands in contrast with the sign of immaturity which is to be “**unskilled/inexperienced in the word of righteousness”**