

HEBREWS 5:11-14  
Dull of Hearing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YT3erQZoq4>

TV commercial – “Just OK is not OK.” We’ll get back to that in a few minutes...

Last week we saw 5:1-10 and he leads up to talking about Melchizedek, so we expect him to pick up and explain what that means. But SURPRISE, SURPRISE, SURPRISE. He doesn’t. He goes into a lengthy sobering warning and admonition. He starts stepping on some toes. He takes a very serious tone as he admonishes them.

Today’s content is for those with ears to hear and as the text indicates, it is for mature audiences. You have been warned.

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary 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 not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Basically, he’s saying, “I should be telling you about rich truth of Christ and Melchizedek, but you can’t handle the truth, yet. You’re still like a flabby little baby man, just taking in milk. You can’t appreciate the full significance of the relationship of Christ and Melchizedek. You haven’t really grasped the basic principles yet, but you should have.”

There are various ways to define or describe a maturing believer. According to this text we’ll use this definition.

A maturing Christian is one who hears the truth and exercises him/herself in the power of the Holy Spirit to discern the good and avoid the evil.

The author identifies the problem – Dull of hearing- “sluggish or lazy” – only other use is Heb 6:12  
11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

\*\*\* WARNING – summer is a time when there is a great temptation to be “sluggish” about spiritual things.

v. 12 The result was the arrested development in their spiritual lives. They ought to be teachers who are taking in solid food, but they remain as those who must go back to elementary school and only drink milk.

The original audience of HEBREWS would understand this point made by Chad Bird on his FB feed. Chad Bird – author, OT PROF at Concordia – 40 minutes in the OT podcast

When we read in the Old Testament that we are to “obey” God, the Hebrew behind that word is usually something different. The Hebrew literally is “listen to the voice of.”

Now this puts things in a very different light.

“To listen to the voice of” means that at least two people are involved (God and me/us); it’s a relational reality that we’re talking about; and the very voice that enters the ear is the voice of the Word which contains the Spirit of God to accomplish the divine will.

So when you read in the OT that you are to "obey" God, do a translation in your head to "listen to the voice of God." In other words, open your ears, let the Word in, believe that word, cling to it, and trust that it will be active within you to accomplish that for which God sent it. Obey? Well, yes, to be sure. But that obedience is nothing more than the fruit accomplished by the Word himself.

Now from the theological to the very practical...

VODIE BAUCAM has some strong things to say on this topic – buckle up men (and women), though Vodie was speaking primarily to men. A few weeks ago after a sermon two people came up and said, "you could have just filled in my name for that message."

It wasn't me, and I did not have them in mind. The same is true for today, but if the Holy Spirit makes a connection, then listen and be ready to respond.

Vodie Baucham, a well known African American preacher has thoughts on the topic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtxWTRtOvh>

He makes the observation that "in modern evangelical culture, we will NOT tolerate biblical, spiritual, and theological maturity among MEN! We just won't have it!

What? How can he say that? We're here aren't we? There are books and conferences for men, right?

In most churches a young man who is reading bible and theology, has a passion for God, Christ, and His Word, and people look at him and say, "God must be calling you to preach."

It's as if the only Christian men who would be doing that are those going into "full-time" Jesus work.

We ought to be saying, "That just means you're a Christian."

The mediocrity of spirituality among the majority of men is saying, "You need to get away from the rest of us and go to seminary and be a pastor so I no longer feel guilty about my mediocre pursuits.

Therefore Christian culture is the only place where we tolerate the disconnect of a man saying, "I've been at this 10, 15, 20, 30 years and I know nothing or very little."

Name the field where that is acceptable. Name the hobby or recreational pursuit where that is acceptable or normal.

EX: older experienced man on his job 20, 30, 40 years (a brick layer, teacher, manager, fireman, etc, and a new hire comes and says, "You've been at this for a while. Could you show me how it's done? Could I just come along beside you and watch you and learn from you? I'll bet you're good at it after all these years."

The expectation would be for the older man to say, "Yes, I can do that." But when it comes to the things of Christ, the Bible, the walk of faith if a young man comes to an older man whose been a believer for 20, 30, 40 years and asks, "Sir, can I come alongside you and learn about God, the faith, the Christian life, and walking with God," the response may well be, "I'm no preacher."

This is the only place in American where we accept something so ludicrous, where a man can say, "I've been walking with God for 20, 30, 40 years, and I proudly declare, 'I know nothing. I'm ignorant. I'm a 20, 30, 40 year old baby in Christ, and I'm not ashamed of it. Only in the church is that acceptable."

But scripture tells us that a mark of a man or woman who walks with God should not be dull of hearing but should be able to be a teacher. We are called to hold fast to our confession. That is addressed to every believer, not just those with ordination papers. The Regular reading of scripture over 5, 10, 20, 30 years ought to make us somewhat of an expert. If not an expert, then someone who can give advice and input to a younger believer." (end quote)

Hebrews isn't saying that all should be professional 'teachers' or pastors, but that all should be growing in the knowledge and experience of God and able to share that with others. Most of the time that will be in an informal setting over a meal, or working on a project or on a drive in the car, etc.  
\*\* Remember that circles are better than rows for impacting the lives of others.

\*\*\* FRONT LOADED Application model TO CONSIDER: take the initiative, don't wait to be asked

### 222 PRINCIPLE OF GROWTH

- ❖ 2 Mentors (Holy Spirit + 1)
- ❖ 2 Gospel friends
- ❖ 2 Disciples – one believer; one non-believer

What is sobering is that Vodie Baucham and the author of Hebrews are not talking about some pursuit that is of minimal importance to our lives, but rather a pursuit where, if pushed, we'd say it is VERY important- the place and role of God, Jesus and His truth in our lives.

Are we settling for mediocrity in our walk with God and our experience with Christ and the Word?

What does it tell us about our hearts and the spiritual battle we're in if we are content to settle for mediocrity in what is the most important thing in our lives?

Hebrews 5-6 give a sober admonition along these lines, "How would you live spiritually if your life depended upon it?" AND IT DOES, FOR ETERNITY. Would you be dull and sluggish?

According to scripture as a whole, and especially Heb 5-6, we learn that :

-It is possible to BECOME dull of hearing, i.e. you weren't but now you are

-There is a correlation between NOT being accustomed (unskillful) to the word of righteousness and being a spiritual infant.

-There is a correlation between being mature and the practice (exercise training like athlete) of discerning good and evil.

We become dull of hearing when we don't give ourselves to the practice of training ("exercise") ourselves according to the Word. Remember that "hearing" and "obeying" are connected.

Any degree of proficiency is lost without use – language, academics (summer is dangerous for forgetting stuff), skill in sports, hunting, art, any endeavor where we build things, playing games, etc.  
– USE IT OR LOSE IT.

The author of Hebrews is warning against bad habits and exhorting toward good habits.

The bad habit is one of omission – neglecting the the word of righteousness for the practice of training our senses or perception.

As we know, "perception is reality", but the issue is one of having the right perception.

We need a biblically informed heart and mind so that we might perceive rightly. And God has given the believer the mind of Christ. But we can become dull of hearing and of perception if we don't exercise the Christ-like mind.

There is a positive and a negative power to spiritual Habit.

James K.A. Smith – You are what you Love: The Power of Spiritual Habit

He explains that we give ourselves to what we love and we may not even realize it. We don't recognize the little habits and rituals we have in our lives – everyday habits and spiritual habits. The key question to consider is "WHAT DO YOU WANT?" 'seek' – JOHN 1:38. – 'seek' used 119 times.

- Seek ye first the kingdom of God – Matt 6
- Col 3:1 if raised up with Christ, seek the things above

James K.A. Smith (I'll paraphrase and put a fuller quote in the notes)

Discipleship is a way to watch over your heart and to pay attention to what it is that you really love. It's not so much about gaining more knowledge, but rather to align our loves and wants with those of Christ. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, hunger and thirst after righteousness" are the practices of a maturing follower of Jesus.

Jesus isn't in the process of simply informing our minds, but of transforming our loves. **When the bible addresses the heart it is asking the question, "What does your heart fondle?"** Knowing Jesus will impact us at that level. If it doesn't then we are dull of hearing – the hearing is not put into practice.

While people are capable of thought, we are first and foremost lovers. Our hearts are captivated by something. Our desire define us more than our thoughts, because our desires drive our thoughts and actions.

One aspect of being human is that we are directed and oriented toward something. To be human is to be on the move. We are always moving toward some end, even if we are only couch potatoes. We are moving toward a goal- intentionally or unintentionally. Following the Bible, Augustine locates the center of this goal orientation in the heart, the seat of our longings and desires.

*Unfortunately, the language of the "heart" (kardia in Greek) has been co-opted in our culture and enlisted in the sappy sentimentalism of Hallmark and thus equated with a kind of emotivism. This is not what the biblical language of "heart" suggests, nor is it what Augustine means. Instead, think of the heart as the fulcrum of your most fundamental longings—a deep seated subconscious orientation to the world.*

<https://mereorthodoxy.com/reviewing-you-are-what-you-love-by-james-k-a-smith/>

What Hebrews 5 is telling us is that dull hearing is connected to a dull heart. We may not recognize it until we examine the results in our lives. We need to do some self-evaluation.

**It's not a hearing problem, but a HEART problem** – EX: Medical drama where a patient had a hearing problem caused by a heart problem. So too with us.

As we do a self-assessment, keep this in mind...

**"Our lives are perfectly designed to produce the results we are currently getting."** (yikes)

That idea has been around for some time in the business world and it applies to our daily life as well – our path of spiritual growth, interpersonal relationships, marriage, habits, diet, how we spend our time and money, etc. It applies to our corporate church life as well.

<http://www.thejohnsonletters.com/blog/life-is-perfectly-designed/>

**This is both sobering and liberating:**

**It is Sobering because it means that we must give up excuse making** for the adaptable areas in our lives that we don't like. We can't change certain qualities or aspects, but we do have "control" over many areas, and if we don't like what is going on, then we need to own it and make changes, not excuses.

**It is LIBERATING because it means that we don't have to stay stuck where we are. Change is possible.** It may not be easy, but it is foreseeable. There is a path forward and God has equipped us for it.

As we make application to our spiritual lives, this principle and the teaching of Hebrews is NOT “just do it” or “Stop it”. It is more than that, but it’s not less than that.

To go from being stuck in the elementary school of dull hearers to being a maturing follower of Christ, changes will have to be made. You can’t keep doing the same thing and expect different results.

Hebrews doesn’t tell us that the answer is in 6 Easy Steps to Eating Solid Food, but it does point out that we need to be honest with ourselves and with God.

When you stop making excuses, you become open to the power of God to bring change.

There is GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US who become dull of hearing – Jesus knows and cares. We are not left alone to pull ourselves up. He gave us His Spirit and His body- the body of Christ in other believers and His body and blood in the Lord’s Table.

When it comes to the things of faith and the Christian life, we need to keep ourselves in the environments where people are maturing.

A maturing Christian is one who hears the truth and exercises him/herself in the power of the Holy Spirit to discern and practice the good and avoid the evil.

THE GOOD IS SOMEONE WE MEET BEFORE IT IS SOMETHING WE PRACTICE.

We have not been given a spirit of fear. We have been given the same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus, so above all we need to keep our eyes on Christ.

Come TO THE TABLE

James K.A. Smith – You Are What You Love

Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love. So discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing. Jesus’s command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his—to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and crave a world where he is all in all—a vision encapsulated by the shorthand “the kingdom of God.”

Jesus is a teacher who doesn’t just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn’t content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings....

What if, instead of starting from the assumption that human beings are thinking things, we started from the conviction that human beings are first and foremost lovers? What if you are defined not by what you know but by what you desire? What if the center and seat of the human person is found not in the heady regions of the intellect but in the heart. ...

Augustine pinpoints the epicenter of human identity: “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”,,,

To be human is to be for something, directed toward something, oriented toward something. To be human is to be on the move, pursuing something, after something. We are like existential sharks: we have to move to live. We are not just static containers for ideas; we are dynamic creatures directed toward some end. In philosophy we have a shorthand term for this: something that is oriented toward an end or telos (a “goal”) is described as “teleological.” ... Augustine locates of the center or “organ” of this teleological orientation in the heart, the

seat of our longings and desires. Unfortunately, the language of the “heart” (kardia in Greek) has been co-opted in our culture and enlisted in the soppy sentimentalism of Hallmark and thus equated with a kind of emotivism. This is not what the biblical language of kardia suggests, nor is it what Augustine means. Instead, think of the heart as the fulcrum of your most fundamental longings—a visceral, subconscious orientation to the world.

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