

Session 13 Dull Hearing And A Call To Maturity

Before the Silence: A Study of Hebrews

Session 13 | Hebrews 5:11-6:3

From Dull Hearing To Maturity (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)

Session 12 showed that Christ, the appointed Son and Priest, learned obedience through suffering, completed His priestly course, and became the source of eternal salvation to those who obey Him. Hebrews now pauses the exposition of Melchisedec because the hearers have become slow to hear. The writer diagnoses their immaturity, warns them against remaining at the elementary stage, and announces the intended movement toward

maturity.

The writer does not propose to abandon truth. He announces that he will move beyond the beginning word concerning Christ and, if God permit, carry his hearers toward the completion of that truth in Messiah. Hebrews 5:11-14 diagnoses the condition; 6:1-3 announces the intended movement.

Hebrews 5:11 - Dull Of Hearing

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

Exegesis

- **“Of whom”** refers especially to Melchisedec and the priesthood already announced in 5:5-10. The writer has much more to explain, but the hearers are not ready to receive it.
- **“Hard to be uttered”** means difficult to explain clearly in the present situation. The difficulty is not a defect in God’s revelation or in Melchisedec’s significance.
- **“Seeing ye are dull of hearing”** identifies the controlling problem. The hearers have *become* slow or sluggish in their response to what they have heard; this was a developed condition, not an unavoidable lack of intelligence.
- Hearing in Hebrews includes attentive reception that leads to faithful response. Their dullness is therefore spiritual and practical, not merely intellectual.
- The rebuke belongs first to this Hebrew audience under an urgent covenant warning. It is more than a general complaint that people dislike deep sermons.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Matthew 13:14-15** - Jesus applies Isaiah’s warning to hearers whose ears are dull and whose hearts resist understanding.
- **Hebrews 3:7-8, 15** - The wilderness generation heard God’s

voice but hardened their hearts.

- **Hebrews 6:12** - The same word translated **“dull”** appears as **“slothful,”** contrasting sluggishness with faith and patience.
- **Hebrews 7:1-3** - The writer eventually gives the promised Melchisedec exposition, proving that the subject is teachable.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Dull”** translates a word describing slowness or sluggishness. It does not mean that the hearers lack intelligence.
- **“Hearing”** can include understanding and responding to a message, not merely detecting sound.
- **“Hard to be uttered”** translates a word meaning difficult to explain or interpret. The difficulty is intensified by the condition of the hearers.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does **not** say Melchisedec is unknowable or that the writer refuses to explain him.
- It does **not** blame the hearers for lacking information they were never given.
- It does **not** permit teachers to make difficult doctrine needlessly obscure.
- It does **not** treat intellectual limitation as identical to moral rejection; the surrounding warning concerns neglected response and arrested growth.

Hebrews 5:12 - Teachers Who Need Milk

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

Exegesis

- **“For when for the time”** places their obligation in a pressing historical season. With the covenant warning approaching its crisis, the Hebrew hearers needed to become students

and teachers of God’s word rather than remain passive dependents.

- They **“ought to be teachers”** in the sense that mature hearers should be able to communicate and reinforce the basic truths they have received. The verse does not require every believer to hold a formal teaching office.
- Instead, they need someone to teach them **“again”** the first principles of God’s oracles. The phrase recalls the divine rev-

elation entrusted to Israel, which makes their unpreparedness especially blameworthy.

- **“Milk”** and **“strong meat”** are illustrations of levels of spiritual nourishment. The contrast is between foundational instruction and fuller understanding, not between two different gospels.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Romans 3:1-2** - Israel’s great advantage was that **“unto them were committed the oracles of God.”**
- **Acts 7:37-38** - Stephen describes Moses as receiving the lively oracles to give unto Israel.
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** - Israelites were to keep God’s words and teach them diligently; receivers of revelation were to become transmitters.
- **Hebrews 6:1-2** - The next verses identify the elementary Hebrew foundation from which the writer intends to move.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“First principles”** means the beginning or elementary ele-

ments of the oracles of God.

- **“Oracles of God”** refers to God’s authoritative utterances and naturally recalls the revelation entrusted to Israel.
- **“Strong meat”** means solid food. The image concerns capacity for fuller instruction, not a different source of nourishment.

Theological Insights

- Time alone does not produce maturity. Growth requires continued attention to God’s word and faithful response to it.
- Basic truths remain necessary foundations. The problem is not learning them, but never building upon them.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does **not** say the foundation is unimportant once a believer seeks maturity.
- It does **not** make advanced-sounding ideas a measure of spiritual health.
- It does **not** assign every Christian a formal teaching office.
- It does **not** identify these Hebrew **“first principles”** simply with the gospel by which a Gentile is justified today.

Hebrews 5:13-14 - Unskilful And Exercised Senses

For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Exegesis

- The one who remains on milk is **“unskilful in the word of righteousness.”** The issue is not that the word is deficient, but that the hearer has not learned to handle and apply it.
- **“He is a babe”** describes the person’s stage of growth. It is a rebuke when continued immaturity has become inconsistent with the time available.
- **“Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age”** identifies readiness for fuller teaching, including the Melchisedec argument the writer has delayed.
- Mature hearers have, **“by reason of use,”** practiced responding to God’s revelation. Their spiritual senses are **“exercised”** like a trained faculty.
- **“To discern both good and evil”** points to moral and doctrinal judgment. Maturity is not fascination with novelty; it is practiced ability to distinguish what accords with God’s word.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Deuteronomy 30:15-20** - Moses sets life and good against death and evil and commands Israel to choose by loving and obeying the LORD.
- **1 Kings 3:9** - Solomon asks for an understanding heart to discern between good and bad among God’s people.
- **Psalms 119:100-104** - Understanding grows through keeping God’s precepts and produces hatred of every false way.
- **Hebrews 12:11** - Chastening yields righteous fruit to those

“exercised thereby,” using the same training word family.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Unskilful”** means inexperienced or untrained. It does not mean the person is incapable of learning.
- **“Word of righteousness”** is a difficult phrase. It may describe teaching about righteousness, a message characterized by righteousness, or instruction that forms righteous discernment. The context favors the broad sense of God’s righteous instruction rather than importing an unexplained Pauline formula.
- **“By reason of use”** emphasizes habit and practice. Discernment grows through repeated obedience to understood truth.
- **“Senses”** refers figuratively to the faculties of perception and judgment.
- **“Full age”** and **“perfection”** in 6:1 come from the same completion word family; neither refers to physical age or moral sinlessness.

Theological Insights

- Biblical maturity joins doctrine and practice. Understanding that is never exercised does not produce dependable discernment.
- Discernment is trained over time; it is not a license for suspicion, novelty, or independent judgment detached from God’s revelation.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does **not** say mature believers become morally sinless or incapable of error.
- It does **not** identify strong meat with speculation beyond Scripture.
- It does **not** make discernment a private authority that over-

rules the written word.

- It does **not** condemn new believers for needing elementary in-

struction; the rebuke concerns remaining there when growth is due.

Hebrews 6:1-2 - Carried Beyond The Foundation

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Exegesis

- **“Therefore”** draws the conclusion from the diagnosis of 5:11-14. Because the hearers have remained immature, the writer will no longer repeat the beginning material but will attempt to carry them into the fuller argument.
- **“Leaving”** is literally **“having left.”** The writer first describes his own movement beyond the beginning material and assumes that his hearers will accompany him.
- **“The principles of the doctrine of Christ”** is more literally the beginning word concerning Christ. The phrase is not identical to **“first principles”** in 5:12, and the point is not that sound Christian doctrine should be discarded.
- **“Let us go on”** is passive in form: **“let us be carried forward.”** The writer intends to carry the hearers with him into the fuller Messianic and priestly argument, subject to God’s permission in verse 3.
- **“Unto perfection”** means toward maturity or completion. Judaism’s beginning testimony must be carried to its designed completion in Messiah, not treated as sufficient without Him.
- The six foundation items are fully at home in Israel’s Scriptures and covenant practice:
 - **“Repentance from dead works”** calls for turning from works that cannot give life, including empty ritual reliance without faithful response to God.
 - **“Faith toward God”** is fundamental Hebrew truth, but does not by itself confess the now-revealed identity and completed work of Jesus the Messiah.
 - Plural **“baptisms”** naturally includes Israel’s ceremonial washings and baptism ministries addressed to Israel.
 - **“Laying on of hands”** was used in Israel for identification, blessing, sacrifice, commission, and appointment.
 - **“Resurrection of the dead”** and **“eternal judgment”** were established Jewish expectations before the cross.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

Hebrews 6:3 - If God Permit

And this will we do, if God permit.

Exegesis

- **“This will we do”** expresses the writer’s settled intention to

- **Hebrews 9:10, 14** - Hebrews uses the same plural noun for **“divers washings”** and says Christ’s blood purges the conscience from dead works.
- **Leviticus 14:8-9; 15:5-13** - Israel’s law repeatedly requires ceremonial washings, supplying the background for plural **“baptisms.”**
- **Numbers 8:10; 27:18-23** - Hands are laid upon the Levites and Joshua for identification and appointment.
- **Daniel 12:2; John 11:24** - Resurrection to life or shame, including resurrection **“at the last day,”** was already part of Jewish expectation.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Let us go on”** translates a passive form of the verb *to carry*: **“let us be carried forward.”**
- **“Perfection”** means maturity, completion, or arrival at an intended goal. It does not mean sinless self-perfection.
- **“Baptisms”** is plural, and Hebrews 9:10 uses the same noun for ritual washings.
- **“Laying on of hands”** appears in several biblical contexts, so the list alone does not define one universal ceremony.

Theological Insights

- These are Hebrew foundations, each present in Israel’s prior revelation. They are not Paul’s outline of the mystery concerning the Body of Christ.
- Messiah brings the foundation to its intended completion. The writer’s movement is away from Jewishness without Messiah, not away from biblical truth.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does **not** tell believers to discard sound doctrine about Christ.
- It does **not** present the six items as a complete statement of the present gospel of grace or the distinctive foundation of the Body of Christ.
- It does **not** reduce plural **“baptisms”** to the one baptism of the Body of Christ.
- It does **not** make every laying on of hands the impartation of a modern charismatic gift.
- It does **not** define perfection as sinless attainment by human effort.

carry the audience toward fuller instruction and maturity.

- **“If God permit”** places that progress under God’s permission and providence. The exhortation demands human response while acknowledging that God governs the outcome.

- The statement prepares for the solemn warning that follows. The writer does proceed, but only after warning and encouraging the Hebrew audience; chapter 7 then resumes Melchisedec.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **James 4:13-15; Acts 18:21** - Human plans are rightly made under the condition of God's will.
- **Hebrews 3:7-8** - Advancement requires hearing rather than

hardening when the Holy Ghost speaks.

- **Hebrews 7:1** - The promised advanced exposition begins when the writer returns to Melchisedec.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does **not** make maturity optional or merely theoretical.
- It does **not** teach fatalism or excuse dull hearing.
- It does **not** disconnect the writer's plan from the Melchisedec exposition he is preparing to give.

Teaching Summary

- Hebrews pauses the exposition of Melchisedec because the hearers have become dull and slow to respond.
- Their immaturity is especially serious in their urgent historical season: they ought to be teachers, yet still need the first principles repeated.
- Milk and strong meat picture foundational and fuller instruction, not different gospels.
- Mature hearers develop discernment through practiced obedience to God's word.

- The six doctrines of Hebrews 6:1-2 are foundations within Israel's revelation, not a summary of the distinctive revelation concerning the Body of Christ.
- The writer has moved beyond Jewishness without Messiah and intends to carry his Hebrew hearers toward the foundation's completion in Christ, if God permit.

One-sentence summary: Because the Hebrews have become dull and unpracticed, the writer intends—if God permit—to carry them beyond Judaism's beginning testimony into its full completion in Messiah.