

The Results Of Dull Hearing

Introduction. Hebrews 5:11-14 is a hortatory digression from the main thought that the author wishes to pursue. He has assured his readers that they do have a great high priest, Jesus Christ. In broad outline He meets the requirements for priesthood. Yet His priesthood possesses a distinctive character, for it is like the order of Melchizedek. It is precisely at this point, on the transcendent doctrine of the priesthood of Melchizedek, that the author pauses to ponder, and regret, the mental outreach of his readers. There are actually several results of dull hearing which need to be pondered lest we find ourselves in the same precarious position.

I. ***Dull Hearing Postpones Consideration Of Difficult And Hard Subjects (vs. 11)***

- A. Dullness of hearing is a metaphor for mental sluggishness and spiritual apathy. At one time, the Hebrews had eager minds, but over the years they had become dull.
- B. It is very difficult to communicate with someone who is deaf, and likewise, the writer finds it hard to get his thoughts into the "ears" of their intelligence.
 1. Being spiritually weak robs time from elders, teachers and preachers of the gospel. Teachers end up spending their lives "pulling" people into the kingdom.
 - a) Hard subjects require heavy thinking (mental ability). Those who are immature cannot handle subjects which are difficult (2 Peter 3:16).
 - b) Sadly, some do not want to know the truth. Knowledge of the truth is dependent upon the desire to know the truth (John 7:17; cf. Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21).
 2. Teaching is a difficult job, but trying to teach those who are purposefully weak discourages those who have the desire to teach.
- C. Isaiah had warned of the dangers of this mental malady which troubled his nation. The problem plagued the generation of Jesus for He explained His teaching in parables by quoting Isaiah's words (Matthew 13:14-15; Isaiah 6:9-10).
 1. This citation from Isaiah is found in all the gospels and quoted by Paul when he received a mixed reception from those he preached to in Rome (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:23-29).
 2. In all these passages it is apparent that the difficulty of understanding the word lay not with the word, but with the hearer.

II. ***Dull Hearing Causes A Teacher Shortage (vs. 12)***

- A. To the ancient mind, a teacher was one who was able to think and act

maturely. These Christians had enough time to mature. It is shameful to see Christians who are of mature age but are spiritual "babes" because they have not grown.

1. They still needed to be taught, as literally rendered, "the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God."
 2. The meaning here must be seen in light of the similar expression in 6:1, which is literally translated as "the word of the beginning of Christ."
 3. Both expressions point back to the initial stages of salvation, when they were first taught the elementary truths of the gospel. These "oracles" include not only the Old Testament but any portion of God's communication to man (Hebrews 1:2; 2:3).
- B. Only those who have grown should be teachers of the gospel (James 3:1). The church is in dire need of those who will take it upon themselves to teach and proclaim the gospel to everyone (2 Timothy 2:2).

III. ***Dull Hearing Keeps The Unskilled, Unskilled (vs. 13)***

- A. Some people, instead of going forward in Christian knowledge, forget the first principles that they learned long ago.
1. The Hebrews had gone backward rather than forward (2 Peter 3:18).
 2. It is truly sad that they needed someone to teach them again.
- B. They could not tolerate strong meat but required milk.
1. The parallels of "child" and "milk" and of the "mature Christian" and "solid food" were well known (1 Corinthians 3:2; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13-14; 1 Peter 2:1-2).
 2. Although they were in spiritual infancy, they were actually on their way to apostasy (Hebrews 3:12; 6:4-6; 10:26-31).
- C. Those that are not improving under careful study and meditation of scripture are displeasing to God (2 Peter 1:5-11). This is just like the "97 lb. weakling" that is always a laughingstock. God wants us to "go on unto perfection" (Hebrews 6:1)!

IV. ***Dull Hearing Makes It Impossible To Discern Between Right And Wrong (vs. 14)***

- A. Babies do not have the ability to discriminate. They cannot choose for themselves but must take what is put before them.
- B. On the other hand, adults are able to make proper distinctions. Just an adult does not need someone to stand over them, always reminding them what is good and bad to eat, so they are able to distinguish good from evil (cf. Isaiah 5:20).
1. This is not good and bad in general, but it refers to good and bad in doctrine (Philippians 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

2. This ability is only gained through study and experience (cf. 1 Kings 3:9-15). This is a mark of maturity, just as it is a mark of maturity to be able to teach. Mature Christians will not be in danger of falling away.

Conclusion. A sobering question to long-time members of the church is, "Are we as the Hebrews?" Are we, who have long been part of Christ's body, not only able, but actually teaching others the gospel of Christ? Are we still babies? If we are, we need to be provoked into developing. The Hebrew writer offers stiff rebukes and forceful language to try and pull his readers from spiritual apathy. We had better listen!