

Dull Of Hearing

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing you have become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God, and have become such as have need of milk and not of solid food" (Hb. 5:11f).

Hebrews 5:11 is a continuing thought, tied to the preceding phrase where of Jesus is said to be *"named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek"* (Heb. 5:10). The Hebrew writer affirmed that he had many things to say about Christ and His priesthood but such would prove hard of interpretation (hard of understanding) because his readers had become dull of hearing. He does not say that what he had to say about Christ's priesthood was hard to understand; the Hebrews would have difficulty understanding because of their own mental block -- dullness of perception.

Isaiah had warned of the dangers of this mental malady which troubled his own nation. The problem plagued Jesus' generation for He explained his "shift" to speaking in parables by quoting Isaiah's words: *"By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and should turn again and I should heal them"* (Mt. 13:14f; Isa. 6:9f). This citation from Isaiah is found in all the gospels and quoted by Paul when he received mixed reception from those he preached to in Rome (Mk. 5:12; Lk. 8:10; Jn. 12:40; Acts 28:26). In all these passages it is apparent that the difficulty of understanding the word lay not with the word, but with the hearer.

Sometimes the problem in understanding arises because one's mind is filled with care and other matters and the word cannot thrive in that heart. Although Moses assured Israel God would *"bring you in unto the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,"* Israel *"hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage"* (Ex. 6:8f). In Jesus' parable of the sower, He spoke of the failure of the seed to be fruitful because *"the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word"* (Mt. 13:22).

Sometimes men fail to understand because they see an implication not intended. Once *"the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread and Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees and they reasoned among themselves, we took no bread.*

And Jesus perceiving it, said " ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because we have no bread? Do ye not perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets ye took up ...?" (Mt. 16:7-9a).

Likely the most frequent reason for dullness in hearing is seen in God's statement to Ezekiel. *"Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired at all by them?"* (Ezek. 14:3). Whatever the reasons for the dullness of heart of the Hebrews, the fault lay with themselves, not with God.

The Hebrews had regressed: gone backward rather than forward. Instead of advancing in grace and knowledge as all Christians should, when they ought by reason of time to have been teaching others, they had need that someone teach them even the basic elements of the gospel. How sad! The Hebrews had reverted to infancy. They could not tolerate strong meat but required milk. Dullness of hearing was a shameful thing to them.

A sobering question to those of us who have been members of the church for many years should be, "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? Or, perish the thought, are we still babies?!

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