

Prayer

In gentleness, Lord Jesus Christ, You came to earth and gave Yourself to the task given You by the Father. Thank You for Your obedience and for Your faithfulness to the mission You were given, and thank You for persisting through persecution for our glory. As we receive the benefits of Your gentleness and grace, may we be inspired to live as You did, and so fulfil the calling You have placed upon us. We pray this in Your name Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Write down a simple list of your most important prayers and keep it with you during the day. It is a straightforward idea, but you may be blessed by putting it into action!

On-going prayers

- **Pray for people in your local hospital.** *Pray for doctors in your local hospital who have the primary responsibility of diagnosing and curing patients who are unwell, and treating those with chronic conditions.*
- *Pray for those who are underprivileged, and who do not have the means to make a better life for themselves. Pray for political leaders who have the responsibility of facing such problems.*
- *Give thanks to God for the things He has done in your life over recent days.*

Meditation

Reign in us, Lord Jesus; come now:

Lead us through baptism from death to life;
Challenge our thoughts and guide our ways;
Speak into our hearts with the Father's authority;
Display Your sovereignty in power and might;
Heal our souls, cast out demons with a word;
Consume our attention as our Master and Lord;
Fight our evils with Your truthfulness and love;
Break all those things we place before You;
Give us now a vision of Your eternal Glory;

Reign in us, Lord Jesus, for evermore.

Bible passage - Hebrews 5:11-14

¹¹ There is much that we have to say to you about Jesus the High Priest which is hard to explain, but you have become lazy in hearing what is said to you. ¹² Although by this time you should be teachers, you need to have someone teach you again the first principles of the things of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³ and all who live on milk are de-skilled in understanding the teaching of righteousness. ¹⁴ On the other hand, solid food is for those who through regular use are disciplined in the skills of discernment, and are therefore able to distinguish between good and evil.

Bible Study

Review

Hebrews suddenly breaks off its description of Jesus as the Great High Priest, which we began to read about yesterday. The writer then speaks quite sharply about his belief that in general, what he was saying about Jesus' priesthood was beyond his readers. He breaks off the discussion of priesthood, returning to this later in chapter 7, and begins a substantial section of the letter dealing with weaknesses amongst the people of God and the dangers of falling away from the received Word of God (see mostly in chapter 6). In our passage today, we read a famous passage which makes a division between the 'milk' and the 'solid food' of teaching about the things of God. Unfortunately, the writer believes that too many believers still need the milk because they are not yet disciplined enough to be able to take on board the deeper truths of God's Word; the solid food!

It is probably true that many Christians today feel somewhat lost when they read parts of Hebrews, particularly chapter 5, and certainly, if Christians of the first century found it hard to follow, then it is not surprising that this will be true for some people now. We should not read these words casually however, but be prepared to read and take on board this tough assessment by Hebrews about those people who have not progressed beyond consuming the milk of God's Word to the solid food. I have translated this passage carefully in order to tease out some of the important points within what the writer has to say.

The first thing we should observe is the writer's criticism of people's laziness in receiving Christian teaching; for this is the gist of verse 11. Hebrews does not imply that people do not understand the things of God because they have not become Christians properly, or they have not understood their baptism, or they have been misled by false teachers (a common problem with the early church, for example; see Paul's writing in Philippians). Rather, his accusation is that some who have become Christians do not think it worth their time to read, explore, listen, pray, and actively pursue their faith. He suggests that if his readers had done this, then his words of explanation about Christ's priesthood and other teaching in his letter would not be necessary, as the people of the church would know about it sufficiently well to be able to teach it themselves (5:14)! Unfortunately, speaking generally rather than any specific teaching, this is as true today as it was then. It is not the whole truth about the problems of God's people, but it is a significant one.

Nevertheless, we should not assume that Hebrews is dismissive of the 'milk'. The writer probably meant that milk was the primary understanding of salvation through Christ and the principles of God's work in the world. It is likely that by this he meant the teaching about baptism that was given to all converts in the early church. This was far more rigorous than any similar teaching we give converts or young people today (records indicate that it could take up to a year for a baptismal candidate to be taught sufficiently about God to be considered for baptism). Hebrews strongly implies that if we do not move on from this, then we can become 'de-skilled'; stuck in an inadequate understanding of the depth and extent of 'righteousness'. This is the detailed teachings about how the work of Christ makes us 'right' with God, and its consequences (5:13).

Going on from this, the writer gives a brief hint at teaching he considers 'solid food'; and it is interesting that he describes the heart of this to be 'discernment'. The Greek words of verse 14 strongly emphasise the importance of putting what we have been taught into practice, and thereby learning to discern what the will of God is and what it is not. In other words, what is right and what is wrong, for God's will is by definition, 'right', or 'righteous', and everything contrary to this by definition, 'evil', or 'wrong'. Unfortunately, discernment is a little emphasised 'gift of the Spirit' (1 Cor 12:10) which derives from our understanding of 'Wisdom' in the Old Testament, and yet Hebrews rates it highly as a mark of maturity in the Christian, and the 'solid food' of the things of God. All in all, this is an important teaching of God's Word that deserves far more attention than it gets. It is indeed a powerful challenge!

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways do we become lazy in hearing, accepting and putting into practice the things we have been taught?
2. How can we ensure we have properly consumed our 'milk', before moving on to the 'solid food' of God's Word?

3. What does the gift 'the discernment of spirits' mean (1 Cor. 12:10)? What place does this have in the life of the church today?

Personal comments by author

I have a small booklet given to me when I confirmed my baptismal promises and became a member of God's church, and this outlines the teachings of the church; it is called a 'catechism'. It is brief, but it covers almost every aspect of teaching about salvation and the church of God, and it can be quickly read. Unfortunately, it is not fashionable to use catechisms today, but I hope they will be used again in coming years; they are so valuable. I use them as a source of debate and as a way of checking out my own beliefs when I am in danger of going off on my own!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- **Something to do:** Search on the internet to find a catechism of the church, either ancient or modern. Read what you can and decide for yourself whether such documents can be helpful. What would you put into a catechism?
- **Something to pray for:** Pray for Christians who have never explored their faith beyond listening to sermons! Pray for a move of God's Spirit to change His people to learners of faith rather than individuals content with how they are!

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, come and be with us at this time. Give us an insight into Your purposes for the Kingdom of the Father. Guide us in our lives now by the grace and power of Your love, and strengthen us for all that You would have us do, both now and in the days to come. Thank You, Holy Spirit: AMEN
