

A Third Warning

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[0:00] If you're looking at Hebrews chapter 5, hear the word of God. Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.

Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible. In the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance.

Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding Him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

[1:45] But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless, and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things.

Things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust, so as to overlook your work, and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints, as you still do.

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness. To have the full assurance of hope until the end. So that you may not be sluggish, or dull.

But imitators of those who through faith and patience, inherit the promises. May God bless the hearing of His word. In 1678, John Bunyan wrote his classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

It is a very encouraging allegory of the Christian life. Just like Christian, we put our faith in Christ, and we are on a journey from the city of destruction to the celestial city in the heavenly Mount Zion.

[3:04] And just like Christian, we are to hold fast to Christ all the way to the end.

Well, early on in the pilgrim's progress, soon after Christian, the main character, enters through the wicked gate. He encounters the interpreter's house.

And the allegory is likely of the Holy Spirit. And the interpreter brings him through the house and opens various doors in various rooms. And he's showing him things one after the other. And one of the things, one of the doors he opens to is a bit shocking.

He opens the door to a man who is sitting by himself in an iron cage. Christian asks him who he is, and it turns out this man was once a flourishing professor of Christ.

Professor in the sense he professed Christ. He too was once a pilgrim, or so he says. When asked what happened, the man in the iron cage says, I left off to wander.

[4:18] He left the path. And so hardened his heart that he can no longer repent. He had crucified Christ a second time. He had fallen away from Christ.

And so Bunyan, it's Bunyan's picture of what we've read here in Hebrews 6. Someone who's fallen away. Someone who's become apostate.

Apostasy is when someone who has at one point professed Christ turns and flat out rejects Christ. Hebrews uses very strong language for this.

It's a refusing to listen to Christ. It's a trampling Christ underfoot. It is a profaning of his blood. It is an outrage to the Holy Spirit.

The interpreter who is with Christian points to that and says, let the meaning of this be an everlasting caution to the pilgrims.

[5:27] And what Christian responds is this. Upon seeing this, Christian says, well, this is fearful. And he cries out to help to God to be watchful and sober.

And then he turns to the interpreter and says, sir, is it not time for me to go on my way? He heeds the warning. And then presses on to the celestial city.

Brothers and sisters, this morning we have the third warning of the book of Hebrews. We must heed the warning to dullness.

And earnestly hold fast to Christ all the way to the end. And this passage unfolds in four ways.

There is a rebuking of the dull. There is an exhorting of the dull.

There is a warning of the dull. And then finally, there is this encouraging of the dull. This passage is a warning to the spiritually dull among us.

[6:35] To earnestly hold fast to Christ to the end. So let's look at this rebuking of the dull in verses 11 through 14.

I've been using that word dull a lot, haven't I? You might be saying, hey, what's up with all the dull language? In 5.11 we read this.

About this we have much to say. This is the writer of Hebrews saying, hey, I really want to talk to you guys about the high priesthood of Jesus in the order of Melchizedek.

It's hard to explain. Not because the concept's hard. It's because you've become dull of hearing.

Dull. Verse 11. And then if you look at chapter 6, verse 12, we read, so that you may not be sluggish.

Sluggish and dull in 5.11, it's the same Greek word. This whole passage is framed in dullness. This is written with the dull in mind.

[7:43] Dull Christians. In verse 11, we read, about this we have much to say. And it's hard to explain since y'all have become dull of hearing.

12. For by this time y'all ought to be teachers. Y'all need someone to teach you again. Y'all again.

The basic principles of oracles. Y'all need milk, not solid food. They've become dull of hearing.

It's a chronic immaturity. Nothing wrong with being immature. Nothing wrong with coming to Christ and being immature and learning the things. This is not talking about that kind of immaturity.

This is a chronic immaturity. This is someone who became a Christian and years later, they're still in the same spot. Needing the same basic teaching again and again. It's kind of spiritual dullness.

And why the warning of apostasy is this. When someone is chronically immature, they're not demonstrating fruit in keeping with repentance.

[8:46] It's like stunted growth. And so what's confusing about that is you don't know whether or not they're a genuine believer or they're someone who just made a profession of Christ but isn't genuinely converted.

And so into that concern, this writer of Hebrews writes this warning. He starts off with a rebuke. And notice that he spells out this kind of contrast between the immature and mature in verses 12 through 14.

He says, of the mature, they're teachers of the oracles of God. They've got a handle on it. They know what God's word says about certain things. They can teach it to others.

But the immature need to be taught the same things again. It's a difference between maturity and maturity. The mature, verse 12, they eat solid food of scripture.

The mature, robust doctrine of the soul, steak, mashed potatoes. The immature just stick to bottles of milk.

[10:00] The mature have had the powers of their discernment trained by constant use. That means that they are hearing God's word. It's penetrating their hearts and that they're living it out. God's word.

They're being trained by the words of righteousness to live for God. They are discerning good and evil and walking in the good way. But the immature are unskilled in the word of righteousness.

They need serious help. They are untrained. They need to be spoon-fed. It's not obvious to them what's the difference between good and evil.

Immaturity. The immaturity being talked about here is a chronic dullness of soul. It's an unskilled in the word of righteousness.

Do you notice how maturity is being defined in terms of one's relationship to God's word? Does it penetrate your heart or not? So spiritual dullness, it starts when you start drifting from God's word.

[11:15] When you start hardening over and God's word ceases to penetrate your heart deeply. If God's word is not feeding your soul.

If God's word is not enlivening your heart. If God's word is not informing your perspective, directing your steps. If God's word is not generating love for the saints.

Do you know what? You're going to be believing someone else's words. So this is a rebuke for the spiritually dull among us.

The chronically immature. Those who have not grown significantly. They're not bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. Our grandson Hudson just turned four months old.

Which means he's just a couple months out from solids. I can't wait. Can't wait to see his face when he put carrots in his mouth. Could you imagine if Hudson is eight years old and his mom's like, Hudson, do you want another bottle now?

[12:21] You know what you'd say? If Hudson was just drinking bottles of milk still at eight years old, you'd be like, what's wrong with Hudson? That's not right. But there is a danger of spiritual dullness.

You start moving into a gray zone. Spiritually. So let me ask you, do you have a hunger for God's word?

Are you regularly consuming God's word? Not just milk, but are you starting to take in solids? Are you getting stretched by God's word?

Are you getting exposed by God's word? Challenged, comforted by God's word? Are you living out God's word? This is a rebuke of the spiritually dull, those who are chronically spiritually mature.

And here's the thing. If you want to go on to maturity, if you want to move from milk to solid food, do you know what that means? You're going to get stretched.

[13:29] You're going to get challenged. You're going to need to concentrate. You're going to need to think carefully about how this word of God applies to my life. It takes effort. Nobody drifts into maturity.

You can't become mature without God's word playing a significant role in your life. So we start with this rebuke of the dull, and then we move on to this exhortation of the dull in chapter 6, 1 through 3. He says, therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. This leaving the elementary doctrines of Christ.

Yes, Jesus is your Savior, but He's so much more. He is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Let's get to talking about that. Let's move on from the basics to advanced teaching, and you will find advanced joy.

He tells them they need to leave the basics. They need to leave the laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God.

[14:38] What that is talking about is we're repenting. We're leaving this idea that I'm saved by my works, and we're moving to this biblical truth that we're saved by faith in God's grace.

We're laying a foundation. Now let's move on. Let's build on that. Let's move on from instructions about washings.

It's not washing your hands that can clean your internal heart. It's only through the blood of Jesus.

Let's move on from laying of hands and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment that day when we all stand before the throne of God and have to give an account for our lives, Matthew 25, Revelation 20.

So let's, these are good. These are necessary, but we got to move on. When he says we leave these things, he's not saying we disregard them.

He's saying we build on them. Build on those foundations. Go on to maturity. We are to move from milk to solid food.

[15:52] Solid food will grow you. Milk is good. Solid food, man, that is really good. When you are eating the solid food of what the Bible teaches

about God, there's a class going on, TDI class.

Les is teaching it about the doctrine of God. And as you learn more and more about who God is revealed and the truth of scriptures, it is solid food for the souls. You're like, you are awesome and I'm little.

It stirs your affections. It grows you in your worship. When you move from milk to solid food, you will start to see the depth of your sin. God's word penetrating your heart will expose the depth of your sin and the depth of God's grace.

When you encounter hardships, the solid food will keep you anchored. When you encounter the complexities of life, the solid food doesn't give you overly simplistic answers.

God's word gives you nuanced explanations of the complexities of life. We move on to maturity. God's word will challenge your thinking.

[17:27] God's word will help you understand people in the nitties and gritties of humanity. In order to go on to maturity, you will be stretched and challenged and exposed and made uncomfortable by God's word.

But God's word is also going to comfort you. And it's kind of like bring in knowledge and goodness that you will be grown through the stretch.

No one drifts into Christian maturity. No one. You don't become mature by accident. It's by moving from milk to solid food.

Maturity. Maturity is being skilled in applying God's word to your life. You're training yourself in God's word.

One of the classic explanations of the difference between those immature and those mature is immature are that they need someone else to feed them God's word. The mature are able to feed themselves with God's word.

[18:48] And respond and respond and grow. Let me ask you this question. Do you really want to settle for a bottle of milk when you can have a multi-course steak dinner?

Don't settle. Don't settle. Move on to maturity. Press into your Bibles. Now you may be asking this question like, well, how do I do that?

What does that look like? You press into maturity by consuming God's word. Sunday morning. Sunday after Sunday. I am committed before God and to you. I am not going to water down what the Bible says. I can't. It would be unloving to you.

And so I'm going to give you meal after meal. And you know what? It's going to take, it's going to require you to concentrate. It's going to require you to follow nuanced arguments because that's what the Bible does.

[19:57] And what you're going to find is as you rise to it, you're going to find God's grace transforming you. Sunday after Sunday.

The preaching of God's word, the hearing of God's word, that is one way that you move on to maturity. Another way is you're reading your Bible daily. You're having a quiet time or a devotional. You're opening up your Bible.

I'm in 2 Corinthians right now and I am being stretched. God is growing me unto maturity. We have other classes like the Discipleship Institute. These are designed to grow you, to feed you, to give you solid food.

There's great books out there, plenty of podcasts, other preachers. One of the best things that you can do in order to be stretched and to grow unto maturity.

Do you know what it is? You saddle up next to a more mature Christian. You saddle up next to them and you imitate what they're doing. You're like, okay, I want to be like that.

[21:03] Hey man, what are you doing? Can you show me? And you know what that person is going to say to you? It's going to have something to do with God's word. We have moved from a rebuke to an exhortation.

Go on to maturity, brothers and sisters. And now we move to the warning. The warning of the dull. This is in verses 4 through 6.

I'm wondering if you were arrested by this when you heard it. For it is impossible, verse 4, for those who have fallen away to restore them again to repentance.

What a warning. Now I've been trying to take some pains here to help you understand the context of which this warning falls.

The writer of the book of Hebrews is writing verses 4 through 6 in the midst of addressing spiritual dullness in the church.

[22:14] It's a way of calling for people to go on to maturity.

Spiritual dullness is those Christians who are professing to be Christians, but they're not evidently growing. And what the concern is, is that that could be symptomatic of early onset apostasy.

If you're not growing, why not? Is it because you're not laying hold of the means of grace? Or is it because you've not been born of God? And so he is writing this particular warning, and it is stark. Because there's this kind of like spiritual gray zone. When someone, apostasy again, is like when someone professes Christ.

And they may even have some pretty profound experiences. But eventually they come and reject Christ. They turn from him.

[23:22] They deny him. And what I believe is that if someone does that, they've not been genuinely converted. They were never a Christian to begin with.

And there are reasons why I believe that. I believe that because of my understanding of God's sovereign role in the election of Christians.

I believe that because of the efficacy, the power of Christ's death. I believe that because of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that because God's love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, Romans 8.

I believe this because of the solid food of God's word. What is this warning all about then? How are we to think about these warnings?

[24:20] Because this is one of five warnings in the book of Hebrews. How do we make sense of these things? Well, think of these warnings as a means of God's grace for genuine Christians to keep on the journey.

Do you remember Christians' response to seeing the man in the iron cage? This is fearful. Help me, God. Help me to be watchful and sober that my heart not grow hard.

And now it's time to get going. I got to get on the road. I'm moving to the celestial city. It motivates genuine Christians. So let's dive into this little passage.

The first thing I want you to notice in verse 4 is the word case. For it is impossible in the case of those who've once been enlightened but fall away. Now look at verse 9. Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things.

Things that belong to salvation. And so what's going on here is that the writer of Hebrews is using a hypothetical situation, a case scenario, to address something to his audience.

[25:38] Notice the people he's calling beloved. The people he's calling beloved, who is confident of better things, things regarding salvation. He's not saying that this church has fallen away.

He believes that they're actually saved. But he's warning them with this case of those who've fallen away. Notice five descriptions of those who have fallen away.

Verses 4 and 5. Who have once been enlightened. Who have tasted the heavenly gift. Have shared in the Holy Spirit. Have tasted the goodness of the word of God.

And the powers of the age to come. And then fall away. What is going on here? Because that sounds like a Christian. Once enlightened, at some point they understood the gospel.

Tasted of the heavenly gift. They've experienced some kind of saving experience. Shared in the Holy Spirit. They have experienced something of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[26:39] The presence of the Holy Spirit. They've tasted of the goodness of God's word. They have left a service and said, boy, that was a good sermon. They have tasted of the powers of the age to come.

They've been affected by the promise of a heavenly. A new earth. A new heavens. A new Jerusalem. It sounds like they're Christians.

But you know what? I don't think they are. Do you know why? I've got three reasons. Can I tell you? Here's reason number one. The parable. Jesus gives this parable in Mark chapter 4.

It's the parable of the sower. The sower is sowing seed and he casts the seed wide. And some of that seed falls on a path. Some of that seed falls on rocky soil.

Another of that seed falls among thorns. And then the final group of seed, it falls among good soil. So there's four different soils talked about. But there's only two different kinds of people there.

[27:45] And the people, you know it's two different kinds of people based upon their fruitfulness. The seed that falls on the hard ground, birds come and pluck up, bears no fruit.

The seed that falls upon the rocky soil, it shoots up fast and then the heat of day dries it up and it withers. No fruit. And then the seed that falls among the thorns, it starts to grow up but gets choked out by the thorns.

It bears no fruit. These are not Christians. No. The real Christian is the good soil in which the word of God falls and it goes down under the surface.

And it yields 30, 60, 100 fold. So do you know what this means? We will be with people who have responses of like soil two and three.

They'll hear the word of God. They'll shoot up but they won't last. They'll hear the word of God but then they'll get choked out because their real treasure gets exposed. So there's the parable.

[29:04] That's the first reason why. I don't think these people who are having these experiences in Hebrews chapter 6 are actually genuine Christians. The second reason why is precedent.

In Hebrews chapter 3, the writer does this exposition of Psalm 95. Remember that? And he's pointing back to the wilderness generation.

And he keeps on saying today if you harden your voice. If you harden your heart. If you hear his voice and harden your heart. You will not enter my rest. That generation is an example of a people who were experiencing the power and the presence of God.

Yet they didn't enter God's rest. It's an example right from Hebrews of a people who've had experiences yet their unbelief caught up with them.

And they were not allowed in. That tells me that these people who've had these experiences in 4 and 5, they're not genuine believers. But the third reason.

[30:12] Blasphemy. That little phrase, fall away, in verse 6, and then have fallen away. You can read that and you're like, well, man, that doesn't sound so bad.

It sounds like something happened to those people. Not that they did something. But then you start reading the rest of Hebrews. And you start understanding what the rest of Hebrews has to say about these people who've fallen away.

That they're the ones who've hardened their hearts. Turn in your Hebrews to chapter 10. It's another warning passage. Of these people who have fallen away, the writer says this in verse 26.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Look down at verse 29. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God?

And has profaned the blood of the covenant. His blood. By which he was sanctified. And has outraged the Spirit of grace. That's those who have fallen away.

[31:18] If you look at chapter 12, verse 25. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

And who's that? That's Jesus. Exalted at the right hand of God. So check it out. These people who are having an experience of the Holy Spirit.

They share in the Holy Spirit. But then they turn around and they reject Christ. They trample him underfoot. They profane his blood.

They outrage the Holy Spirit. Do you know what this is? It's blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And that's why it's impossible to restore them to repentance.

They are so hardened that they have removed themselves from the reach of God's grace.

[32:21] That's how far this has gone. So these people who have fallen away, this isn't some kind of temporary questioning of your king. This is a settled rejection of him.

[38:11] In verse 9, though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things. He moves from this case situation of apostasy back to the church. And he says, in your case, hey, we're confident of better things, things of salvation. And now we have to ask, well, what is he basing that on? What is he seeing? Verse 10, for God is not unjust so as to overlook your work. He bases this on God's fairness. God is not unjust. He's fair. He's just. But what is God seeing? For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name and serving the saints as you still do. Now there's the fruit. It's not experiences.

It's love. It's love. Love for the saints and serving them. That's the cardinal virtue of a Christian. That is the first things where God shows up. He changes a person's life and he totally flips them. And instead of living for themselves, they start to live for God and others. This is fruit of repentance. This is fruit of conversion. And so the author, having warned them of apostasy, now encourages them with a vote of confidence and says, hey, God sees what you're doing, both past and future serving, past and present serving. So he encourages them to be Christ-like because Jesus in his love for his father came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. In verses 11 and 12, I'll wrap this up. He spurs them on with one more thing. See the word earnestness. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end so that you may not be sluggish. Do you know what the opposite of being dull is? Being earnest. And throughout the New Testament, that's translated into a few different words. Words like eager, words like zealous. In 2 Peter 1.5, it's make every effort.

And we are to hold fast earnestly our hope all the way to the end. And I'm going to preach on that hope next week. You can see it. Verse 19, we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf. He is our hope. And so we saddle up next to people and imitate them, verse 12, who by faith and patience are themselves holding fast to Jesus all the way to the end. And we earnestly saddle up next to them and hold fast to our hope as well, all the way to the end. Heed the warning. Earnestly hold fast to your hope. This passage is about spiritual dullness, a chronic immaturity that can be symptomatic of early onset apostasy. And so it requires rebuke.

It requires exhortation. It requires warning. It requires encouragement. After Christian sees the man in the iron cage, he heeds the warning, seeks God's help, and continues on his journey to the celestial city.

[42:18] He holds fast to Christ all the way to the end. And so must we. Let's pray together.

God in heaven, God in heaven, would you have your way through your word in our hearts? Would you, Lord Jesus, would you help us, strengthen us, encourage us to say no to spiritual dullness, to drift, and to say yes to going on to maturity, to say yes to moving from milk to solid food. Grow us, God. Grow us by your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.