

# Are You A Spiritually Mature Christian?

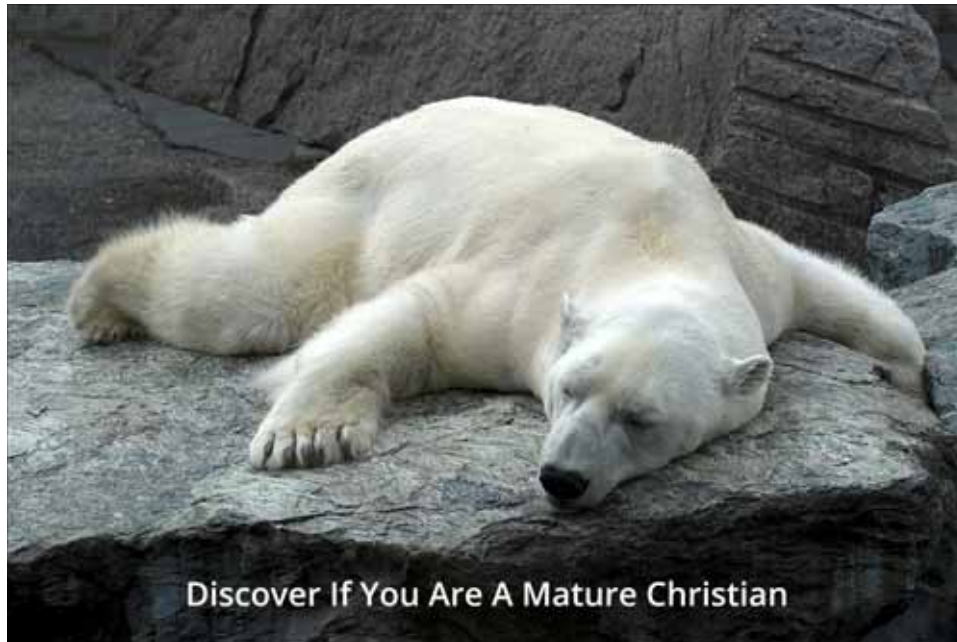
**O**ur study is the third warning in the book of Hebrews. It begins in Hebrews 5:11 and continues to chapter 6 and verse 20. The first warning occurred in the first part of Hebrews 2. That warning challenged us to listen to the gospel about Jesus and not to drift away from it. If we ignore the warning, we will miss eternal salvation.

The second warning starts in Hebrews 3:7 and continues into chapter 4 verse 13. There we were warned to not harden our hearts, but instead to believe. The third warning is a rebuke to those who claim to be Christians and are spiritually dull. It will become clear later that there are reasons to doubt if some of these people were Christians because they were not growing spiritually.

This study interrupts a discussion about Melchizedek that began in chapter 5. In chapters 1 and 2 the Holy Spirit proved to us that Jesus is greater than the angels. That was important for the Jewish readers who highly respected angels. In chapter 3 the Holy Spirit made the point that Jesus is greater than Moses. In chapter 5 we saw that Jesus was also greater than Aaron and that Jesus is our eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek. That is, Jesus is God, is more faithful than Moses, is an eternal high priest, and His priesthood continues forever. That has been the message so far.

Now the Holy Spirit interrupts His discussion and

teaches us some deeper truth about Melchizedek, but those to whom the book was written were too immature to be capable of understanding (Hebrews 5:11). Therefore, the Holy Spirit rebuked them using six unique Greek words that only appear in the book of Hebrews. Now there is only one reason why the Spirit would use these six Greek words in His message. The Greek words were needed because that was the best way that He could communicate His message. These words do not show up in the rest of the New Testament. This reveals the importance of this passage of Scripture. In this study you will discover what the Holy Spirit told them, and understand why those who claimed to be Christians needed to hear His message.



**T E A C H -  
I N G   A B O U T  
M E L C H I Z E D E K  
I N T E R R U P T E D.**  
Our study starts with Hebrews 5:11 and you will discover immediately that we are reminded of someone called "him."

**Concerning him  
we have much to**

**say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. Hebrews 5:11 (NASB)**

The first question we need to ask is, "Who is 'him' in verse 11"? Is this person Jesus or Melchizedek? The answer is Melchizedek. The reason is that the author of Hebrews has been discussing Melchizedek from verse 5 through verse 10. At the end of verse 10, the author of Hebrews referred to Melchizedek.

... being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:10 (NASB)

Notice that Melchizedek was the last person in the discussion. Therefore, it is only natural that the 'him' refers to Melchizedek. In fact, the author will resume his discussion about Melchizedek later in Hebrews 6:20 and then continue through Hebrews 7:20. Therefore verse 11 is an interruption of the Spirit's discussion about Melchizedek in order to give a warning.

Now I have to admit that when I first was introduced to Melchizedek as a young man, I was not interested in learning about him. Melchizedek seemed to be a rather boring and uninteresting person. I also discovered that some people enjoyed arguing about Melchizedek, and that caused me to pull away. This time when I studied this passage, I said to myself, "Melchizedek cannot be very interesting." But this time the Holy Spirit helped me understand that Melchizedek is a very important person. I have enjoyed learning about Melchizedek this time.

**MAJOR SIGN OF IMMATURE CHRISTIANS.** The Holy Spirit tells us in verse 11, "Concerning him we have much to say." The Spirit had the author of Hebrews write, "it is hard to explain, since you are dull of hearing." Now when the author of Hebrews says that it is hard to explain, there are only three possible reasons this is true. The first reason why it may be hard to explain depends upon the quality of the teacher. The second reason is that the subject matter may be too difficult. The third reason is that the hearer or the listener may have a problem learning. But the problem cannot be a poor teacher since the teacher is the Holy Spirit. He is the ultimate teacher. The subject matter cannot be the problem either because the Holy Spirit is motivating the author of Hebrews to write Scripture. That is, the words are inspired. Therefore, the listeners are the problem. That is why we are told that they are "dull of hearing."

Now we have a question, "What does 'dull of hearing' mean?" If we compare various Bible versions, we discover that the New King James Version Bible also reads "dull of hearing." The New International Version reads "slow to

learn." The New Living Translation says "spiritually dull and you don't seem to want to listen." So what does dull of hearing mean?

The first word in the phrase "dull of hearing" is dull and it is translated from the Greek word *nothros*. *Nothros* occurs only two times in the New Testament and both times it appears in the book of Hebrews. The first time it appears in Hebrews 5:11 and the second time the word appears in Hebrews 6:12. Hebrews 6:12 reads as,

... so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:12 (NASB)

Did you find the translation of *nothros* in this verse? The word *nothros* is translated here as "sluggish." We must ask the question, "Why is it translated as 'dull' in one verse and 'sluggish' in another verse? Why are there two different translations of the same word?" The reason is that the word has a range in meaning. Variations like this often occur when this is the situation.

The Greek word *nothros* can mean "sluggish," "lazy," "slow," "faltering," "listless" or "negligent." The literal meaning of the word is "no pushers." It does not mean slow to learn. The idea is that they did not push themselves. They were not interested in pushing themselves to understand the Scriptures. They were lazy and wanted to be spoon-fed the word of God. Serious Bible study did not appeal to them.

That is a stunning statement for anyone who claims to be a Christian and only opens their Bible on Sunday and then eagerly waits for the pastor's sermon to end! How would you like to have the Holy Spirit, a teacher, or pastor say, "You are dull of hearing! You are lazy. You are not pushing yourself." It is obvious the people to whom Hebrews was written probably did not like hearing these words since they were not studying the Word of God, as we will soon discover. They wanted the Scriptures to be spoon-fed to them.

Over the years I have found that a church can offer a Bible study on some important topic and people will come to the study, listen and praise the teacher for his excellent teaching. But if homework is required, fewer people will come, or the

dropout rate is unusually higher. To be blunt, some Christians are not very serious about Bible study and doing some digging on their own. They think they have more important priorities. This is not uncommon. It happens because many people are just like the folks to whom the letter of Hebrews is written. They are "no-pushers." They are not interested in pushing themselves to discover the deeper truths of God's word. That is the Holy Spirit's message.

When the people to whom the book of Hebrews was written are described as "dull of hearing," the Holy Spirit is not saying that they had difficulty hearing. He is not trying to insult them. He is warning them. Their problem was that they wanted the study of the Bible to be easy. They liked the stories of Daniel in the lions' den, the story of Jonah and the fish, the fall of Jericho, Jesus and the magi at Christmas, or Jesus and the shepherds. They wanted application of the Word. They were not interested in actually learning the Word of God in depth. For some, the idea of taking a survey of the books of the Old Testament, a Bible study about the minor prophets, or a Bible class in systematic theology does not sound appealing. They respond, "That is not something I am interested in. That sounds like a college class." Such attitudes are a reflection of the sad state of Christians today.

We can imagine that a Bible study about Melchizedek would be poorly attended and that is why the author rebuked them. Who would want to attend a class about him? The author wanted to discuss Melchizedek, but he knew they would not understand nor would they be motivated to understand because they were not used to digging in the Word of God. The Holy Spirit wanted to discuss Melchizedek but it was going to be difficult. Therefore, He informed them of their problem and explained that the teaching was going to become difficult.

Christians often comfort themselves that the Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth. They quote John 16:13 and claim a promise that Jesus gave to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. While the promise does not apply to us, it does illustrate the truth that the Holy Spirit helps us to know and understand truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 we are given the principle that the Holy Spirit is the one who teaches us. I have heard some Christians

say, "The Holy Spirit teaches us. I can learn the Bible on my own." That is true to some degree, but such comments miss the important truth that the Holy Spirit has given us spiritually gifted teachers because we need them in order to learn! Why give us spiritually gifted teachers if we do not need them (Romans 12:3-8)? We cannot learn every biblical truth on our own without help. The truth is we cannot learn everything on our own.

If you are a no-pusher, there will be some truths that will be very difficult for the Holy Spirit to teach you. Yes, He is the teacher, but if you are not accustomed to working hard to learn the Word of God, if you are not regularly digging, if you are not searching for the nuggets of gold in the pages of Scripture, if you are a *nothros*, then you will miss precious truths. You will discover soon in Hebrews that you are an immature Christian. The folks to whom Hebrews was written were not mature in the faith. They were not growing in their faith because they were either not Christians or not willing to push themselves to study in order to understand Scripture.

Andrew Murray, a famous Scottish pastor, has the following to say about this passage.

In the Christian Church there are at last too many of whom we would fain hope that they were believers, who are living in this state. They are content with the thought of pardon and the hope of Heaven. They rest in their orthodoxy, their attachment to the Church and its services, and their correct deportment.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. J. Vernon McGee echoes what Andrew Murray says, when he writes the following.

Ear trouble, today, is the biggest problem of believers. Christ as a priest after the order of Melchizedek is a difficult subject, and the writer is going to deal with it forthrightly. To understand the subject requires sharp spiritual perception. It requires folks to be spiritually alert and to have a knowledge of the word of God, and to be *close* to it. The Hebrew believers being addressed here had a low S.Q., not an I.Q., but an

1. Andrew Murray. The Holiest Of All. Fleming H. Revell. 1993 p. 216

S.Q., spiritual quotient. It was hard to teach them because it was difficult to make them understand. They were babies, as many of the Christians are today, and they want baby-talk, even from the preacher. They don't want to hear anything that is difficult to understand. This is the reason some preachers are getting by with murder in the pulpit—they murder the word of God. They absolutely kill it and substitute something from their own viewpoint, and the congregation likes that kind of baby-talk.<sup>2</sup>

Andrew Murray lived about A.D. 1828-1917 years ago and Dr. J. Vernon McGee lived about A.D. 1904-1988 years ago. They would only be more discouraged if they were alive today.

One would think that Christians would be different now. Some years ago I was talking with a local pastor who confided to me that he had a difficult time explaining some of the deeper truths of Scripture. His comment revealed the spiritual condition of the people in the church.

The same problem existed at the time the Holy Spirit wrote the book of Hebrews in A.D. 67-69. Andrew Murray and J. Vernon McGee echoed the same truth. It is a problem that has continued down through the ages to our time. It is a historic problem in the Christian Church. Some of those who attend the church are either not Christians or they are spiritually lazy. They are not pushing themselves to understand the deeper truths of Scripture.

When a person is not growing in their faith, there is reason to doubt they are a Christian, because Christians should be growing in their knowledge of the truth. It is a sign of spiritual maturity (1 John 2:12-14). Therefore, Hebrews 5:11-14 is a warning section. The warning is that either you are not a Christian or you are not growing. If you are not growing, then there is strong reason to be concerned that you are not a Christian. The question is, which are you?

**MATURE CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW THE WORD.** Now you may ask say, "Why were they not growing?" Verse 12 begins to answer the question.

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:12 (NAS)*

This is a difficult passage to accept because it says, "For though by this time you ought to be ... teachers." He says, "by this time." By what time? Sometime since they claimed that they were Christians. These folks had claimed they were Christians and time had elapsed. Now the Spirit says, "By this time, you ought to be able to teach others." He is not saying they should have the spiritual gift of teaching.

What the author of Hebrews is saying is they ought to be able to teach others. No matter who you are, a mature Christian is one who will eventually be able to teach others. This does not mean that you are gifted in teaching. In fact, you may be a poor teacher, but you should be able to at least explain the truths of Scripture. Can you share the gospel with somebody who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Are you able to share Romans 3:23 where it says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"? Or how about Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"? How about Romans 10:9 where we are told, "... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Can you describe what they are saying? These are basic verses about Jesus Christ and salvation that every Christian ought to be able to share with others.

**THEY NEED THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES AGAIN.** Now notice the middle of verse 12.

*... you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles. Hebrews 5:12b (NASB)*

He says "again." Did you get that? He says, "You have need again." In other words, he reveals that at one point in their life they knew the biblical truths, but now they needed to be taught again. Notice that he says they knew the elementary truths or doctrines of God.

I have always been fascinated that whenever a church

2. Dr. J. Vernon McGee. Thru The Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1983. vol. V, p. 542.

offers a class on basic church doctrine often very few people attend the class. Most Christians think that they know the Bible. The truth is most Christians do not understand what they don't know. There are various levels of doctrinal truths in the Bible. Some of the truths are very simple and more appropriate for new believers in Christ. They have just come to know Jesus. They are babies in Jesus. Therefore, they need the elementary truths of the Bible or we could say the milk of the Word. Then there are doctrines that more difficult to understand. These are for the more mature Christians.

What we have discovered is that when we offer a class on biblical doctrines, we need to change the wording from "basic doctrines" for something that is more appealing. Then people will come and discover that there is something they have not learned. As soon as most people hear the words "basic" or "elementary," immediately they respond with, "Oh, I know that. I am not a baby in Christ. I am more advanced. I have gone beyond that."

Notice that the author of Hebrews said they needed to be taught the elementary principles again. You might ask, "What elementary principles is he talking about?" The answer is given to us in Hebrews 6:1. He introduces us to at least some of them. Most likely all of them are not listed.

Hebrews 6:1a says,

[Therefore leaving the elementary teaching ... Hebrews 6:1a \(NASB\)](#)

He is going to list some of the elementary principles.

[... about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God ... Hebrews 6:1b \(NASB\)](#)

Notice that he is referring to doctrines or teachings about the faith. Verse 2 continues the list of elementary truths.

[... of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. Hebrews 6:2 \(NASB\)](#)

Most of us would say, "I know the elementary doctrines of the faith."

On my bookcase I have many books about doctrines. When I started studying, I realized that I knew very little about the faith. There are truths about the faith I am still learning. Do you know some of the elementary truths



of the Holy Spirit listed? Do you know about repentance, the resurrection of the dead, or how about eternal judgment? The message the Holy Spirit sent to these people is that they needed someone to teach them the elementary principles once again.

**BABIES ARE ON A DIET OF MILK.** Next notice in verse 12 that the Spirit says: "You have come to need milk." The word "need" is in the present tense and implies that they were in a state of ongoing need. They need milk! In verse 13 the author of Hebrews explains further.

[For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. Hebrews 5:13 \(NSAB\)](#)

This is a sad verse. It reveals that these people, who claimed to be Christians, were spiritually immature. Notice that the Spirit says, "For everyone who partakes." The word "partakes" in the Greek is also in the present tense, and it has the sense that these folks were habitually on a diet of milk. Milk is for babies. He says at the end of the verse "for he is an infant."

In the Greek there are different words for different stages in life. There is a Greek word for a newborn baby and several other words for older children. The word that is used here for infant is *nepois*. It does not refer to a newborn, but to a child that is older than a newborn but less than three years. The Holy Spirit told these Christians that they were not spiritually mature. They were just like toddlers. They were just barely beyond infancy. He said, "They were not a brand-new Christian, but they had not grown very much beyond that."

When He said "again" in verse 12, He revealed that they once knew the elementary truths or doctrines but now they had regressed. They had gone backwards in their spiritual life and now they are once again spiritual babies. They are back on a diet of milk and not solid food.

Wasn't the Holy Spirit tough with these folks? Many Christians would feel insulted if someone told them, "You thought you were a mature Christian because you have lived for so many years as a Christian, but the Holy Spirit says, 'You are a baby Christian.' You are on a diet of milk and you have regressed backwards. You have slipped backwards in your spiritual walk with God. Now you are a spiritual infant just a little bit beyond being a newborn baby in Jesus Christ."

This verse reminds me of one of our daughters. When she was born, we were excited. At first, she needed milk but later we started giving her some baby food, ground-up food, maybe carrots or meat. We would put some on a spoon and put it in her mouth, and I was amazed that she spit it back out! She would push the food out with her tongue and it would drop on the table. She did not want the solid food. She did not understand that she needed meat such as steak, chicken or something solid. She wanted the milk. The Holy Spirit warned the Hebrews that they were on a baby's diet of milk. They did not want the solid food. They just did not

want it! Therefore, the Holy Spirit warned them that they were not growing spiritually. The worse situation was that some of them may not be Christians since true Christians will grow in their knowledge of the Word of God (1 John 2:12-14).

**MATURE CHRISTIANS ARE ON A DIET OF MEAT.** In verse 14, the Holy Spirit now contrasts spiritual infants who are on a diet of milk to the spiritually mature who are on a diet of solid food.

**But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:14 (NASB)**

The word "practice" implies a pattern of repeated behavior. It refers to a diet of solid food. Mature Christians are not on a diet of milk but on a diet of solid food which is the Word of God. They are either on a diet of stories and application or they are chewing on the meat of the Word containing bone and gristle and in the process applying the truths to themselves, by the help of the Spirit. Notice that those who are on a diet of solid food or meat are able to understand the difference between good and evil. Those on a diet of milk will not. How are you doing?

The message of this passage is that Christians are either growing toward maturity or slipping backward. One cannot stand still spiritually in the Christian life. The Christian life is like a woman walking up an escalator that is going down. If you stop climbing up the escalator, you will begin going down. When a Christian stops digging in the Word of God, they are no longer moving toward maturity but returning to infancy. A person who gains Bible knowledge and then thinks they can stop studying because they know much will start to lose it.

**CONCLUSION.** Where are you? Are you a Christian? If you say that you are a Christian, what kind of a Christian are you? Can I give you a test to help you understand where you are? Here is the test. Check out your spiritual diet. For which of the following two groups of classes, if you had a choice, would you sign up? The first class in this group is called the "Keys to Spiritual Growth." The second one "How to

Have Victory Over Anger." The third class is "Biblical Principles For Financial Prosperity." Maybe you would like "Keys to a Successful Marriage," or "A Woman After God's Heart," or how about "Spurgeon on Practical Wisdom"?



The second group of classes includes these studies, "The Trinity," "The Doctrine of Salvation," "Studies in Systematic Theology," "The Attributes of God" or a "Study of Ezekiel." Question: Which of these groups of studies appeal to you? Do you like the first group, or do you like the second group of classes? What's your passion?

Maybe the better question is, which set of classes would you ultimately have chosen? Your answer reveals whether or not you are really serious about maturing in Jesus Christ. Your answer also reveals the diet you have already been on. People who are used to eating bread, cheese and steak are not

happy with milk all the time. Your choice will determine if you desire to mature. Those who are mature will seek the meat of the Word of God because that is the diet to which they are accustomed.

The first set of classes would be wonderful. I would enjoy

teaching or attending some of them. Even though you might like the first of classes, would you ignore the second set of classes? The second set of classes is not elementary. The second group of classes will cause you to grow beyond expectations. The second set is for those who want to mature in the faith. They will cause you to grow more than the first set will. The first set will help you, but it will not help you grow in giant steps. The second set is the kind of classes that will significantly cause you to grow in Christ.

This is a call to not be spiritually lazy but to grow and assure yourself that you are in fact a real Christian.