

January 13, 2019 -

Hebrews 5:11-14-

Where Are you Spiritually?

Introduction:

Have you ever heard of a “walking fish?” Well, the axolotl (pronounced “Ax-oh-lot-ul”) salamander is known as the Mexican walking fish. However, it really is not a fish and is only indigenous in the mountain lakes of Mexico. It is now an endangered species of the salamander. What is different about them is that they retain tadpole-like characteristics throughout their entire life. Axolotls are a great example of neoteny. Now that means retention of some larval or immature characters in adulthood because as they grow bigger they never mature. Unlike tadpoles or similar animals, axolotls hold on to their gills and stay in the water, despite actually growing lungs. Writers and philosophers have used the axolotl as a symbol of someone who fears growth.

In Hebrews chapter 5 we learn about Christians who were avoiding healthy growth, remaining content with spiritual “milk” intended for new believers. Perhaps because of the fear of persecution they weren’t growing in their faith and grace. Some Christians are like that they have been saved for years but they are Ax-oh-lot-ul Christians and suffer from spiritual “neoteny” that is the existence of juvenile features in an adult.

So how old are you? Not your chronological age but what is your spiritual age? I don't mean how many years has it been since you were saved. I am asking, "Are you spiritually mature for your Christian years?" If you don't know for sure, you should after we finish our review of Hebrews 5:11-14. The writer of Hebrews now encourages his readers to move on toward maturity. However, we don't know to move on unless we first realize we are immature. Sometimes we need a push like the Ax-oh-lot-ul who if injected with iodine enters into their adult stage. This passage reveals three requirements for becoming spiritually mature...

I Two basic characteristics of spiritual immaturity (5: 11-12)....

1. Slothful hearing. The writer begins with a strong rebuke, saying there is much more to say about the similarity of the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of Melchizedek. However, it is hard for him to explain it to his readers According to the last phrase of Hebrews 5:11 they still needed to be taught because they were dull of hearing.

The adjective translated dull (no-thros') means "sluggish" or "lazy." It doesn't refer to intellectual deficiency but to "lazy" hearing. Immature Christians who are dull of hearing don't get excited about studying God's Word. They only attend worship or Bible study out of habit or because of peer pressure from fellow believers. Believers who are dull, or lazy, of hearing don't bring Bibles to church; they don't follow along with the text; and they don't care about applying scriptures to their personal lives. As a result, they live lives of perpetual, spiritual immaturity. The first characteristic of spiritual immaturity is slothful ears, the second is-

2. Slothful minds. Apparently, some of the Hebrew Christians have been believers for some time. Therefore, the writer states they should be at the stage of the Christian lives where they would be teachers. However, he writes about his readers in Hebrews 5:12 that they still need instructions like children. They still struggled with the basics of the faith.

Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but we are all called to share what we have learned from the Word of God. We are all called to apply what we have learned from the Word of God. The phrase first principles refer to the basics, or the ABC's, of the Bible. Immature believers have lazy minds, so instead of teaching others, they need the basics of the faith taught to them over and over again. We should be growing if we are fed regularly.

3. Do you know the elementary principles of God's Word? I think the most basic principle is the plan of salvation. If someone asked you how to become a Christian, could you tell them? My favorite plan of salvation is called "The Roman Road" and consists of five verses: Rom. 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, & 10:9. Every believer should know a simple way to present the plan of salvation. This is simply obeying the Lord's command in Mark 16:15. **And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.**

The plan of salvation is one of the first principles of the oracles of God (5:12c). The word oracles (logion, log'-ee-on) means "utterances" or "words." God's utterances are found in the Bible. If you cannot share the first principles of God's Word, including the plan of salvation, you are immature. The reason for your spiritual immaturity is a Slothful mind.

To become spiritually mature, explore the characteristics of spiritual immaturity and ...Then examine the causes of spiritual immaturity.

II Two basic causes of spiritual immaturity (5:12c-13)

1. Lack of Spiritual foods. The original readers of Hebrews were still feeding on the spiritual milk instead of strong meat, which means "solid food" (5:12c). An exclusive milk diet is acceptable for newborn babies, but not for adults. Let's suppose you invited someone home for dinner. When it came time to eat they asked for baby food. They just want baby food. Wouldn't you be shocked, or perhaps insulted?

How do you think God feels when Christians who have been believers for years need spiritual baby food during Bible study or worship services? When we stop learning, we stop growing. This is what God commands in 2 Peter 3:18... But grow in grace, and [in] the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ... and other passages. In that verse, the verb *grow* is present tense, active voice. Present tense means continuous action. Active voice means the subject ("you") does the action. This means if you are not continually growing, it is your fault.

There is no such thing as a stationary Christian. In the Christian life, you are either growing or back-sliding, getting closer to the Lord or moving away. Living a Christian life on spiritual baby food diet leads to inability to make personal application.

2. Lack of Spiritual Discernment. Immature believers who live on spiritual milk are unskillful in the word of righteousness. (5:13a). Unskillful means they cannot apply to their lives what they hear or read in the Bible. The phrase "*word of righteousness*" refers to Scriptures that teach the difference between right and wrong. In other words, immature Christians don't put forth the thought and energy to make personal application and to become doers of the word (Jas. 1:22).

Mature believers are not afraid to apply the Word of God, even when it might be difficult. We know how to approach other who offend us and we know not to offend a weaker brother; etc. Sadly we often apply the means of the world...**I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able.** The causes of spiritual immaturity are a baby food diet and the inability to make personal application. There are two components for spiritual maturity ...

III. Two basic cures for spiritual immaturity (5:14).

1. Proper diet. This must include strong meat [solid food] (5:14a). What is the difference between milk and solid food? Solid food must be chewed or processed. In the spiritual sense, the difference between milk and strong meat has to do with the way we process, or apply, Scripture. The Word of God is milk to those who hear it but do not apply it. However, it is strong meat to those who both hear it and apply it. So, right now if you just hear the Word and don't apply it to your life, it is milk. But if you apply what you hear, then it is strong meat to you. For example, according to Psalm 119:9b, how can you keep your life pure?

This requires personal application. A proper diet is not just reading or listening to the Word of God; it is applying it to your life by putting it into practice. The first cure for spiritual immaturity is a proper diet and the second is...

2. Proper exercise. Mature believers are those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (5:14b). The word translated exercised (GYMNAZO, goom-nah'-zo) is the word from which we get our English word "gymnasium." When you go to the gym, what do you do? Exercise! Maturing spiritually requires more than intake; it requires exercising God's Word. We train ourselves to discern the difference between good and evil, or right and wrong, based on the application of the Bible. We are living in a culture that is trying to change our view of good and evil, of right and wrong. Therefore, on any controversial issue, a mature believer will pray the prayer in Psalm 119:169 that we read earlier.

Conclusion:

As we grow in Christ by applying the Word of God, we become more sensitive to what is good and what is evil, not only in our culture but in our own lives. Do you? Are you saved?