



VII. Milk or Meat?

"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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Hebrews 5:12-14

These three verses are about our spiritual diet ... about spiritual *milk* and stronger spiritual *solid food*. The Greek word translated as *solid* in the verses above is a word that means strong, firm, solid, or steadfast. The Greek word translated as *food* means meat, nourishment, meal, or rations. I prefer the King James Bible translation of *solid food* as *strong meat*. Looking back to the beginning of Hebrews 5, the superiority of Christ's priesthood is presented ... and that theme is continued into the following chapters. Immediately before the verses above, Christ's priesthood is compared to the Old Testament pre-Levitical priesthood of Melchizedek. Such a comparison is not milk. It is strong meat! Moreover, as stated in verse 14, such strong food is for the mature ... for the spiritual grown-ups. Much of today's Christianity promotes immaturity and spiritual atrophy. Milk is preached while meat is seldom taught. How long have you been a Christian? Has it been long enough that *"by this time you ought to be teachers"* might apply to you? Could that be the product of a self-perpetuating, milk-only diet?

The need for milk. There is a vital need for the milk of Bible basics in a new believer's life. Many ministries do a fine job at evangelism and teaching basic follow-up to new believers. An infant needs the simple basics of the pure milk of the Word to begin to grow. As Peter wrote, *"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"* 1 Peter 2:2. However, if an evangelistic ministry does not continue on to equipping the saints with strong meat, it will not move new believers (individually or as a body) to maturity ... *"to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,"* Ephesians 4:13.

Every word of the Word. Quoting Deuteronomy 8:1-6, Jesus said, *"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,"* Matthew 4:4. That statement is a huge challenge. There are over 800,000 words in the Bible! Let me soften that a little ... there are only a little over 31,000 verses, only 1,189 chapters, and only 66 books. Paul wrote that all Scripture is God-breathed, 2 Timothy 3:16. Therefore, the challenge stands ... do not be on a milk-only diet. Press on diligently to the full meat of every word of God's Word. That is the challenge.

Is such a challenge Biblical? Yes! The statement of Jesus from Matthew 4:4 is enough to answer that question affirmatively. Such a challenge may be implied by, or inferred from, Paul's statement,

"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose (counsel) of God," Acts 20:27. However, such a conclusion may be based on a milk interpretation. The word translated there as *purpose* means will, counsel, purpose, or motive as seen in its seven other occurrences in Acts and in I Corinthians 4:5, Ephesians 1:11, and Hebrews 6:17. Paul's words from Acts 20:27 may not mean *all of the Word*. However, there are passages that do teach the need for the strong meat of all the words of all of God's Word.

All Scripture is profitable. *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work,"* 2 Timothy 3:16-17. That is *all ... not just some!*

A lamp and a light. *"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,"* Psalm 119:105. The whole Bible is a guide for the whole of life. This verse does not mean that a single out-of-context verse can give the needed direction for your next step or for your life's course. The more you know of God's Word, the safer you are in using it as a life-guide. Solomon's words to his son could be God's statement to us as His children. *"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life,"* Proverbs 6:23.

The role of leaders. Ministry leaders are not given by Christ to steal our ministries from us. In many situations, it seems that the saints (the sons and daughters of God) equip their leaders so that the leaders can fulfill their own ministries while the leaders do not equip the Saints for their ministries. That is not the model presented in Scripture. Sound in-depth teaching is necessary for believers, individually and corporately, to grow up into the full measure of the fullness of Christ. Ministry overseers must be able to teach, I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9. Moreover, they must teach ... meaning they must equip the saints for their ministries.

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love," Ephesians 4:11-16.

Transferable Truth. Jesus prayed for His Disciples, and for us, that God would *"Sanctify them in truth, Your Word is truth,"* John 17:17. That truth is not meant to be hoarded. We are to transfer it to others who can transfer it to others ... and on and on. Jesus gave us the Great Commission to go make disciples ... part of that being to teach new disciples to observe all that He had commanded, Matthew 28:18-20. Paul wrote of this transfer-

able truth to his son in the faith, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,"* 2 Timothy 2:1-2. Preaching in the New Testament was a means to proclaim the Gospel and to bring lost people to faith in Christ. However, teaching in the New Testament was a means to equip the saints with transferable truth. Unfortunately, many of today's leaders preach milk to believers rather than teach transferable meat to them. As a result, many believers are, *"tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,"* Ephesians 4:14.

The time of ear tickling. A milk diet can become self-perpetuating and seemingly addictive. Veal Christians are not accustomed to digesting solid food. Therefore, they seek leaders who offer warm soothing milk and man-made myths. *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths,"* 2 Timothy 4:3-4. That time has come.

The dilemma of atrophy. The author of Hebrews faced a dilemma. He needed to teach the meat of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus. However, his readers had atrophied ... needing to learn the basics again. They needed and wanted milk. However, their greater need was for strong meat.

"Concerning him (Melchizedek) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil," Hebrews 5:11-14.

Hebrew believers in Christ were the original audience of the book of Hebrews. They would have been more apt to know Jewish history than would their Gentile counterparts. However, the author of Hebrews knew that it would be difficult to teach them the similarities between Christ's priesthood and that of the Genesis 14 pre-Levitical Melchizedek priesthood. He wrote that it was difficult to explain because they had become dull of hearing. It was not that they would not listen ... but that they could not comprehend deeper spiritual truth. An adequate amount of time had passed since they were saved for them to have become teachers. They had already been taught the basics. However, they needed to be taught the basics again. Their spiritual ears had been dulled. Their spiritual knowledge had dwindled. Their dietary needs had atrophied from meat to milk. He went on to explain that a milk-only diet limits one's ability to comprehend spiritual truth ... describing such people as infants. Solid food is something that one has to be conditioned to digest. Meat is for the spiritually mature ... for the spiritual adults. Verse 14 ends with an additional pre-condition for maturity. Spiritual maturity comes from a meat diet *and* exercise (application) i.e., to those *"who because of practice have their senses trained."*

The challenge to press on to maturity. The author of Hebrews offered more than reproof. He prescribed a cure for their problem. He told them how to leave infancy and press on to maturity.

"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment,"
Hebrews 6:1-2.

The readers of Hebrews needed to be taught the basics again. However, they also needed to move on beyond those elementary teachings. Too many Christians are stuck at, or are constantly revisiting, the beginning of their faith. It is critically important to know the basic facts about Christ and salvation. However, the author of Hebrews prescribed moving beyond those elementary teachings. Paul preached Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 1:23, and Christ as Lord, 2 Corinthians 4:5. However, there is more to Christ than Him crucified. Included in the solid food category is the superiority of His priesthood as seen in its comparison to that of Melchizedek. And have you heard the phrase "simply to the Cross I cling" from the hymn *Rock of Ages*? That is a fine concept. But what did the Holy Spirit instruct us through the author of Hebrews? He did not tell us to go back to the cross. He told us to "*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,*" Hebrews 4:16. Jesus is no longer on the cross. He endured its pain and shame ... but He did not stay there. He is at the Throne of God, Hebrews 12:2. That is where we are told to go in time of need.

What things are included in the elementary teachings that we are to master and move beyond? The first thing is not thinking we need to be saved again ... "*not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.*" That is actually the point of Hebrews 6:4-6 ... stating that it is impossible to save someone who is already saved. Pressing on to maturity is the solution for immaturity. Impossibly getting re-saved is not the solution. We are also to understand and then leave behind the basic instruction about baptisms and commissioning ... *washings and laying on of hands*. The basics of prophecy are also on the leave-behind list. Understand the Bible's basic teaching on the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment ... then move on. Press on with a strong meat diet and use what you learn. Application produces growth. Use it or lose it. The author of Hebrews moved on to the meat about Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 begins with the words, "*For this Melchizedek...*". Hebrews 7 through 10 continues the solid teaching about the superiority of Christ's priesthood. A milk-only diet perpetuates a milk-only diet. A milk-only diet not only perpetuates immaturity but also produces spiritually dulled hearing and regression into spiritual infancy. Have you moved on from milk to strong meat? You are what you eat. Have you mastered the basics? Are you ready to move beyond the elementary teachings? Are you pressing on to maturity? In addition, are you multiplying transferable truth to faithful believers who will perpetuate the process? Have you become a disciple *and* a disciplemaker?

Milk or Meat?, Copyright 2013 is written by John D. Morris III and published by Acts One Eight, Inc. Biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). This document and several other relevant ones are available at www.DiscipleOrBeliever.org ... and may be copied, shared, or posted unchanged and unabbreviated, but only with this source addendum included. You may contact the author directly at John@JohnDMorris.org.