

The author of Hebrews has been gently leading up to this new idea of Jesus, the Son of God, as a High Priest. And now he's just dropped this even wilder idea on our Hebrews: that God had, long ago, in Psalm 110 told the Messiah [Jesus] "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

His Jewish/Christian audience was already going to have a hard time processing the "**high priest**" idea. Now they've got to process this "**order of Melchizedek**" idea too. By the way some Rabbis took a "**less favorable**" **view of Melchizedek** because in Gen14 he blesses Abraham *before* he blesses God. So they painted Mel as a "bad actor" and taught that his priesthood was rescinded and given to Abraham. So our author's audience *might* even have some negative association with Melchizedek's name.

But before he goes on to explain about Melchizedek, he "calls them out" for a bad case of **Self-Inflicted Arrested Development** –of a spiritual variety. You know what "*arrested development*" is, right? [Besides a sitcom about a dysfunctionally, spoiled family.] It's just like it sounds: growth, development of some sort, that should proceed in a predictable fashion, stops and doesn't resume, and as a result there are negative consequences. **Arrested Development** can mean being stuck at a certain emotional or physical or psychological level of development and not progressing as expected.

Think of a fat little caterpillar. It's spent the last few weeks chowing down on every delicious leaf it can wrap it's mandibles around. And now it feels an internal urge to wrap itself up in a cocoon or chrysalis. And it gets all wrapped up and thinks to itself: Hey, I could not be more comfortable. I'm full of food and this sleeping bag is so cozy. You know, forget this metamorphosis stuff. I'm staying right here, just the way I am. I learned to love my body the way it is. I don't want any wings. I'm afraid of heights anyway. Nope. I'm just gonna settle in and stay right here. That's self-inflicted arrested development. Now if that were possible the result would be one contented but dead caterpillar because she's GOT to change and grow to live and complete the life-cycle ordained for her.

Obviously no caterpillar can "choose" to arrest its development. But you get the picture. How about this? I started learning to play the guitar when I was maybe 13. Debbie Carruthers lent me her beginning books and **I taught myself the chords** and went at it. I spent a huge amount of time, **every day playing my guitar** and singing good and loud upstairs in my room. I learned all the chords for the keys of C & D and G and Em and Am & Bm. I could strum and finger pick a little bit and as I was performing a lot in my teen and college years I continued to gain a few more small skills.

But I wasn't interested in guitar proficiency. I was interested in accompanying myself as I sang. So right about in my college years, just about the time I got married **I stopped learning anything new about playing the guitar.** No bar-chords, no picking, no riffs, no blues chords, no harmonics, no nothing. **And it was an intentional choice on my part.** I saw no need to put in the effort.

So I arrested my own guitar-playing development. And **35 years later** I'm no better now than I was then- and, in fact I think I'm losing ground these days.

You see that's a clean case of **self-inflicted Arrested Development**.

There was all sorts of room to learn and grow and develop skills and play better so I would have more enjoyment and be able to do more things- be able to join in with more people. But I said, "Nope, that's too hard. As long as I can play worship songs in the easy keys, I'll be fine. Don't need anything else, thank you very much.

And while there's nothing morally wrong with me deciding not to get better at the guitar. There's definitely a problem with deciding "I got enough of this Jesus stuff, I don't need any more." Our Hebrews had professed faith in Jesus a while ago. Now they're being persecuted. Growing in faith was getting difficult [like the bar-chords I never learned]. And they were thinking, hey, I think we've got enough of this Jesus- we don't really need any more. It's hard to do and it hurts when we try.

So this morning let us consider: *The Listener's Responsibility, The Listener's Regression, and the Listener's Regimen*.

I. The Listener's Responsibility

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because **you no longer try to understand**. NAS: NAS Heb. 5:11 ... *it is* hard to explain, since you have **become dull of hearing**. Remember when you were in school- high school, college, whatever- you remember that class period right after lunch with a full belly and a warm room and a talking head. Remember that? The class might as well be a box of glazed donuts: starring eyes, no comprehension- **dull of hearing**.

From this verse, it seems pretty clear that our author knew these people well and had enough spiritual/social capital with them that he could afford to make this sharp point: You're sluggish, dull. *You're about as quick as a sloth on Valium. If you took an iguana and put him in your freezer for twenty minutes and took him out he would still be quicker on the uptake than you folks. You're thick as an old-school milkshake: there's nothing moving through the straw.*

Warnings about hearing have already come up in Hebrews: Heb. 2:1 We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. And Heb. 3:7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, **8** do not harden your hearts.

But notice: they haven't always been this way. The NAS says "you **have become** dull of hearing." The NIV says: "you **no longer** try to understand." Implying strongly that there was once a time when they weren't glazed as donuts or slow as a sloth. There was a time when they were eager to understand
And that's a change that should not have happened.

Behind this lies an expectation that when the **Word is taught the hearer has as much responsibility as the speaker**. Our author seems to expect that followers of Jesus should be as actively interested in learning more about the Word of God and their faith

and the practice of it as the Psalmist who speaks of God's word saying: **19:10** They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

So there's a question worth considering: When you arrive on Sunday or any day you open the scripture, are your faculties focused on learning and understanding and applying God's intentions for you in the teaching. You are responsible.

Are you pressing further up and further in, or settling down for a nice sluggish arrested development?

II. The Listener's Regression

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

Here, once again is the clear expectation that **followers of Jesus are expected to move "further up and further in."** They came to Jesus by the apostles preaching [2:3]. They were progressing really well. There's a snapshot of their beginnings in

ch10: **Heb. 10:32** Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. **33** Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. **34** You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

And they did all THAT on a diet of Milk- on the rudiments of the faith, the ABC's of their faith in Christ. Their behavior then and the progress they were making **marked a trajectory** that leads our author to think enough time has gone by that they should be so far beyond the ABC's of the faith that they should not only be able to grasp Jesus as High Priest; they should be fully equipped to be teaching others.

But, for some reason instead of pressing further in to Christ they've stopped their forward movement and even drifted backwards far enough that the preacher accuses them of needing to go back to their *magnetic ABC's on the refrigerator door and their baby bottle of warm milk.*

This Milk/solid food analogy gets used a few times in the NT. **Peter** writes to his people saying: **1Pet. 2:2** Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, **Paul**, chastising the Corinthians for their factions in the church writes:

1Cor. 3:1 ...I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

By "**Milk**" Peter, Paul & our mystery author of Hebrews mean the rudimentary bits of the Gospel, the ABC's of faith in Christ, the basics one needs to know to embrace Jesus as Lord.

Now **there's nothing wrong with milk.** Milk is good-especially if you're a baby and it's the only thing you can digest. You've GOT to have it. But as we grow older our diet progresses, because it MUST. We enjoy: fish and waffles, and chicken and chocolate and Brussels Sprouts and bananas, Beef Stew and strawberries. For the sake of healthy growth it

has to be this way. **We HAVE to learn to consume more complex foods that will sustain a larger, more active, more creative, more energetic body in its work.**

Similarly “Jesus loves me this I know...” is a delicious cold glass of Milk that we love to drink down. But God is in the process of redeeming all the world- and the pages of scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life open up a menu of incredible God-ordained cuisine for the heart, soul and mind. Isaiah says: **Is. 25:6** The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *And* refined, aged wine. If you say, ew, I don’t really like that. I’ll just have a glass of milk, thanks. No. Not okay. The self-imposed dietary restriction affects your growth and so your ability to live the Gospel well in an ever-changing, morally complex world.

Of course even when mature and eating all sorts of foods we consume some milk: in scrambled eggs, on our cereal, with our cookies. **But it’s no longer the central, singular source of our sustenance.**

These days I am so holy I don’t eat at McDonald’s. When I was a kid we did all the time. And we took our kids there too and they always got a “Happy Meal” – a little burger, a little fries, a little coke and a toy. I promise you that if I said to my adult children: “Let’s go out and get a burger;” They’d be thinking “Monster Burger at Halibuts and Scampi’s or something. The last thing they’d be expecting would be a tiny little child’s Happy Meal.

Why? Because their appetites have grown up. Milk and Happy Meals aren’t enough- and rightly so. **Our Hebrews have not only ceased to grow; they’ve regressed to a state where they don’t even want to try a beefier faith.** And that’s a problem. Again the question is: *Are you pressing further up and further in, or settling down for a nice sluggish arrested development- with your glass of milk?*

The Listener’s Regimen [regular training schedule]

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. **14** But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The list of things an infant is “not acquainted with” is extensive. An infant can’t play a Mozart Sonata. An Infant can’t drive you to work. An infant can’t juggle chainsaws...well, neither can most adults. An infant can’t tie her shoes or do his taxes or complete a Geometry proof. **And that’s okay!!**

In an infant that’s engaged in the normal process of growth everything they can’t do is fine. As long as they’re growing and progressing it’s okay they can’t do those things. In time, in their continued growth they’ll learn to do those things- except for maybe the chainsaw juggling.

And besides the physical skills, **as we grow we learn to extrapolate from what we know** so we can figure out how to handle new situations. As we age our **sense of discernment increases**, and we become more capable of marking what is right or wrong, what is good or evil. We don’t walk down dark alleys, We don’t go with strange men to

look at the puppies in their van, We don't email our bank account number to the Nigerian Prince. This is what's often called "common sense." It's something we grow up into.

According to these verses the "Milk-Christian" - one who has refused to grow beyond the basics- is inexperienced, or unfamiliar with the "word of righteousness" or "teaching about righteousness" and will have difficulty distinguishing good from evil in our constantly changing, morally complex world.

Jesus Followers **need to progress and mature in our Faith** because **the Enemy** is on a non-stop production effort to roll out all sorts of morally ambiguous challenges in hopes of tripping up God's people. Our Enemy LOVES taking what is right and good and twisting it into a devilish maze of good and evil where the way out is lost and it's nigh impossible to tell where the good began or the evil ends. And there seems to be no way to free those trapped within.

The Enemy's love of **twisting good and evil into a demonic pretzel** demands our self-arrested congregation grasp the need for a **sound training regimen** that includes solid-food instruction and consistent, dedicated effort by those in training- like the way I went after the guitar in the beginning.

This has been the call to Christians since day #1 of the Church.

Think about it: **the NT is packed with examples of complex moral dilemmas that required the exercise of maturity that comes from consistent faith and practice.**

For instance:

The question: whether non-Jews had to obey all the Jewish law to become a Christian- circumcision.

The question: if meat once offered to an idol was okay for a Christians to buy from the butcher.

The question: how do Christians of one culture live & serve with Christians of another - All of Romans was written for this.

How about sex: In Corinth one group of Christians concluded sex is bad in all contexts: don't ever do it. Another group concluded: sex is good and we're all forgiven for every sin- so let's get at it!!

Complex, see?

Think of the complex issues we followers of Jesus have to navigate today: the idea of Gender fluidity; Patriotism vs. your Kingdom citizenship, Racism and Privilege and God's call to consider others more important than ourselves; de-regulation and it's effects on God's creation for which you and I as His people are responsible, Families broken by divorce again and again and again, Multitudes of Men in power consistently taking advantage of women and then thinking it's okay to use bogus bible references to justify themselves.

The Milk of "Jesus loves me this I know" is important. But sorting out the good and evil of the issues I just mentioned and a thousand others like them requires more than the Gospel ABC's.

We NEED the maturity of “solid-food.” The consistent regimen of such is promised [with the Spirits help, of course] to help us “**distinguish good from evil**” and navigate the Enemy’s morality mazes and remain in Christ.

Followers of Jesus must understand **that it is God’s intention for us to become proficient in understanding and using the entire message of God’s healing, restoring, saving justice.**

Knowing and being able to spot what is right and wrong on God’s scale of assessment in our **morally shifty world** is a critical but difficult task.

And, in my opinion, culturally-speaking, on the whole, we are a nation of milk-drinkers and are poorly equipped to determine good from evil.

The mature will have taken in their milk [ABCs of the Gospel] and used it to grow [actively applying it to their lives, constantly practicing it] And their spiritual maturity will increase, naturally making them ravenously hungry for solid food- deeper understanding. As they consume that, [a regular training & practice regimen] the “**teaching about righteousness**” will, naturally, rise up stronger and clearer helping them discern good from evil in our complex world. This is the promise of this scriptural warning.

In the Chronicles of Narnia at the end of the series and the end of Narnia when they finally reach Aslan’s Country- the cry rings out again and again “**Further up and Further in!**” And they all race deeper and deeper in, and higher and higher up into the world, God had always planned for them. Lewis uses the same idea in The Great Divorce- in which ghosts from Hell can visit the outskirts of Heaven. **Author George MacDonald** is Lewis’ guide. He states: “Every one of us lives only to journey further and further into the mountains.” Which we see when one of the ghosts finally accepts the help of a flaming spirit and is transformed to a strapping man riding a glorious silvery-white stallion off like a shooting star into the foothills and up the mountains.

So we end with the same question: In your Faith in Christ are you settling down for a nice sluggish, sloth-on-valium, arrested development, or *Are you seeking to press further up and further in?*

You think about that.