

YOU OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS!

TO FOLLOW JESUS 2



Moving from milk to solid food in the Word of God.

T. M. MOORE

A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

You Ought to Be Teachers!

You Ought to Be Teachers
To Follow Jesus Part 2
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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

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You Ought to Be Teachers!

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Welcome to *You Ought to Be Teachers*

As we might expect, there are certain matters that ought to characterize everyone who is a true follower of Jesus Christ.

We think of such things as going to church, reading our Bibles, giving, learning to pray and worship, practicing love toward our neighbors, and so forth.

But what about teaching? Should *every* follower of Jesus Christ expect to teach others? To use his or her words to inform, instruct, and edify others with the Good News of Jesus Christ?

According to the writer of the book of Hebrews, the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” We *all* ought to be teachers, all who have made the Kingdom turn and are following Jesus as His disciples. That doesn’t mean we all become lecturers or Bible study leaders. But it *does* mean we know how to formulate and share words of edification and instruction with the people around, both our fellow believers and those who have yet to believe the Good News, and that we do so consistently and with effects.

So why isn’t this happening? The writer of Hebrews has some thoughts, as well as some recommendations to help each of us step into the footsteps of Jesus more firmly by recognizing, accepting, preparing for, and beginning to exercise our calling to teach the people to whom God sends us each day.

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study, *To Follow Jesus*, that you might grow in Him and His calling each and every day of your life.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Who? Me?

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5.12

Every Christian's calling

Ask anyone who's ever been responsible to fill Sunday school or VBS teaching slots – they'll tell you it's a thankless job. Like the parable of the wedding feast, it seems almost everyone you ask, cajole, or otherwise try to enlist for teaching has a “really good excuse.”

“I don't have the gift of teaching” or “I don't have time to teach.” Those are perhaps the two most common responses, and I have no doubt that those who make them are doing so out of sincere hearts and honest self-evaluations.

But it's possible to be sincerely wrong at times and to evaluate ourselves by improper standards. For example, what if teaching others the things of the Lord was not simply a matter of *spiritual gifts* or *available time*? What if it was a matter of *duty*? What if being a teacher of the things of Christ were simply part of what's involved in *following* Jesus?

I rather suspect that our response to opportunities to teach would change if we really understood that *teaching is a responsibility incumbent upon every believer in Jesus Christ*. To *follow* Jesus means that we are ready to make the most of every opportunity to *teach* Jesus to others.

Teaching in two directions

That's what the writer of Hebrews is saying in our text. He's not writing to teachers only, but to believers of all kinds scattered in various congregations around the Roman Empire. He's saying that all those who were listening to the reading of this letter – every Christian – had a responsibility to teach: “you ought to be teachers.” You can't get much clearer or more direct than that. If you're hearing or reading this letter, you *ought* to be a teacher. *Every* Christian is charged with the duty of teaching.

Certainly being called to teach Jesus to others doesn't mean we all need to earn special degrees, or be appointed to some particular teaching post in our church. Teaching others is something we do as part of our life of following Jesus, and teaching opportunities open before us in just about every situation.

Think of teaching in the informal *as you are going* view of Jesus (Matt. 28.18-20), and not merely in the formal, classroom template familiar in our churches. Everyone in your [Personal Mission Field](#) is a candidate for instruction, beginning with those who already know Jesus and who therefore, should be eager to learn more about Him.

We are called to teach *one another*, as Paul instructs us in Colossians 3.16 and Romans 15.14. One of the most important contributors to Christian growth is the sharing, encouragement, and instruction we receive from one another, not primarily in formal classroom settings, but mainly in our everyday conversations and interactions.

In the days of the Apostles, the churches didn't have Bible study groups or Sunday school classes. Formal teaching was done by pastors and elders, but all believers were expected to teach, encourage, admonish, and edify one another as part of their ordinary relationships, in *conversations* designed to impart the grace and truth of Christ in love (Eph. 4.15, 29; Col. 4.6).

But all Christians are also called by the Lord to teach *unbelievers*, those we see each day, week after week, who

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have not yet believed the Gospel of the Kingdom or received the command of Jesus to follow Him. The progress of the Gospel has been entrusted to the Church, to every follower of Jesus Christ, all those who have received the Holy Spirit. In His power we are to be witnesses for Christ (Acts 1.8), and, while that certainly involves how we *live*, it also includes the *conversations* we initiate and sustain with the lost people around us.

We ought to be teaching the Good News of Jesus to our neighbors, and we ought to be building one another up in the truths of the Word of God. We *ought* to be teachers! But are we?

No place for place-holders

The Christians who first received the Book of Hebrews were not teaching as it was expected they should. Instead, they were hanging around familiar doctrines, dawdling at the spiritual growth water cooler, and merely holding a place in their church, but contributing nothing to its edification or increase.

They were stuck on a few basic principles of Christian life and doctrine – principles which, because everyone in church knew them, there was no need to talk about them. They must have felt safe and comfortable there, because they didn't evidence any inclination to move on to more "solid food." They weren't growing in the Lord, so they didn't have anything to teach or learn from one another.

And if they didn't talk to *one another* and *teach one another* in the church, it was a sure bet they weren't talking to their lost neighbors, either. As followers of Jesus, these believers were not fulfilling their duty. They *should* have been teachers.

As should *every* follower of the Lord.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that, in some manner, all followers of Jesus *ought* to be teachers? Why do you think most of us are not?
2. What opportunities for talking with others about the Lord do you have during the course of a day?
3. Can you think of anything that might help you begin to be more confident and consistent in teaching others about Jesus?

Next steps – Preparation: Make sure you have mapped out your [Personal Mission Field](#), so you know who the people are to whom the Lord is sending you as a teacher.

2 Edifying One Another

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5.12

Getting started

Every person who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ is responsible to teach other Christians the things of the Lord. *You* ought to be a teacher, just like every other Christian, using your words and conversations to build others up in the life of faith and urge them on to works of love (Heb. 10.24).

This is not an option, friends. It simply comes with the territory. Follow Jesus; be a teacher. We are all charged with the duty of teaching, first, one another in the church, for the edification its members (Eph. 4.29). The sooner we *accept* this charge, and quit rationalizing our way out of it, the sooner we can get on with understanding *what this entails* and beginning *to practice it faithfully*.

The writer of Hebrews goes on in this passage to say, albeit indirectly, that we only learn to teach by teaching; “constant practice” is what brings maturity in *any* area of the life of faith, including our calling to teach (Heb. 5.14, my translation).

So the sooner you get *started* teaching, the better you’ll *become* at it.

The goal of our teaching

There are a few precepts to keep in mind, however, as we begin to take up this task of teaching our fellow believers.

First, we need to make sure of our objective. Paul says we should use our words to build *one another up in the Lord* (Eph. 4.29; 1 Thess. 5.11). We don’t teach our fellow believers merely to impress them with what we know. Or just because we think we should say a few nice words about the Lord. Our goal is *mutual edification* so that we might continue to grow as followers of the Lord.

What does that mean? Well, we can’t *build* something if we don’t have a blueprint, or if we don’t understand what the *finished product* is supposed to look like. Unless we have a good understanding of what a *mature* Christian is, it’s going to be kind of hard to build up our fellow believers.

Peter commands us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18). Presumably, therefore, becoming mature in the Lord – a goal to which we want to contribute by our teaching – is the objective of Christian growth. So we will need to have a clear understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, one who lives as Jesus did (Phil. 2.1-11).

Sent like Jesus

Let’s remember what we said in the first installment in this series on following Jesus. Jesus is sending us, His followers, into the world the same way the Father sent Him (Jn. 20.21). This means looking to the Lord Jesus, taking up His agenda, and embracing the roles Jesus fulfilled while He walked among us.

The father sent Jesus to *seek the lost* (Lk. 19.10). We will be maturing in the Lord when we, like Jesus, have a mind to seek and save the lost as well. Our teaching should be aimed at building other believers up as witnesses for the Lord. One way to do this is to encourage your fellow believers to map out their Personal Mission Fields, as you have done.

Further, Jesus said that He came not to be served but to serve; He showed us how to be *servants* in that upper

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room, when He washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13.1-15). We should, therefore, be teaching one another to become servants of the Lord, people who set aside our own interests and needs to reach out and care for others.

But Jesus also declared that He was the “good shepherd” of His flock (Jn. 10.14). As such He worked hard to build loving relationships, to teach and care for His friends, and to guard them from danger. If we're growing as Christians, shouldn't we be *shepherds*, too?

And, of course, Jesus was a *sover* of God's Word and a *good steward* of everything entrusted to Him. When, therefore, we think about using our conversations and other teaching opportunities to build-up and encourage our fellow believers, these are the kinds of roles we hope to help them fulfill.

Eyes on the prize

So we need to know what we're trying to accomplish as we begin to teach our fellow believers. And what we're trying to accomplish is that we might all increase in the upward calling that leads us into more of Jesus.

But we also need to know what's *available* to us for teaching. Here the writer of Hebrews offers two categories of truth: milk and solid food. “Milk” relates to the basic doctrines of the life of faith (6.1-3) – the doctrine of Christ, repentance from sins, believing in God and trusting Him in all our ways, participating in the life of the church and following church leaders (“washings” and “laying on of hands”), the hope of resurrection, and the promise of eternal life.

It's good to be reminded of these, but we must not be content with *only* these. We need to move on to “solid food” – the more difficult and demanding teachings of Scripture and the doctrines of Christian faith.

Our calling to teach other believers requires that we grow in both the milk and the solid food of God's Word. Only then can we teach other believers so that they might grow to maturity in the Lord.

For reflection

1. What have been some teachings that have been most important to your growth as a follower of Jesus? Why?
2. How would you explain what it means to be *maturing* as a follower of Jesus?
3. In what ways can you see that the roles Jesus fulfilled *require* us to be teachers of one another?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a fellow believer about our calling to be teachers. How has he or she tried to fulfill this calling?

3 All Things to All People

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9.19, 22

To teach the lost

The writer of Hebrews says we “ought to be teachers.” As we have seen, that means we as Christians need to work hard at teaching one another, using the basic doctrines and more profound and demanding teachings of the faith to build one another up in the Lord. We should be growing together as we consider Jesus and urge one another on to maturity in Him.

No Christian is exempt from this calling; each of us needs to discover the best ways faithfully to fulfill our calling to teach other Christians.

But we’re also called to teach the lost. In fact, Jesus has given us His Spirit and promised us His power so that we might be His witness to the people around us (Acts 1.8). Like teaching our fellow Christians, teaching the lost requires that we keep a few things in mind.

Works and words

First, it is important that we remember that good works, as necessary as they are, will save no one. People do not come to faith in Jesus Christ by observing our good works.

Now it’s true that the *lack* of good works can be a stumbling block for those we might be trying to persuade to believe the Gospel. We don’t want to hinder our *teaching about* Christ by failing to *live like* Him.

But the power of the Gospel is not transmitted by works alone; rather, the Gospel must be *communicated by words*, words that convey the Good News that Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins, has been raised for our justification, so that we, by grace through faith, might follow Him as Savior and King, and enjoy the blessings of eternal life, here and forevermore. That is the Gospel, and no one will come to faith and salvation apart from hearing this Good News (Rom. 10.14).

Be consistent in *living* the hope of the Gospel, and you might pique others to want to *learn* it from you (1 Pet. 3.15).

Second, we need to try to *understand the mindset and needs* of the lost people we’re trying to teach. Like the ancient sons of Issachar, we must try to understand the times in which we live, and the people to whom God has sent us, so that we might know both what to do and what to say (1 Chron. 12.32).

Sometimes the language of the Gospel, so precious to us in the household of faith, can sound like religious gibberish to our lost neighbors. Moreover, the things we find to be so meaningful about our relationship with Jesus might not speak to them at all; they may have other needs and interests that focus their thoughts and capture their affections. We won’t be effective as teachers if we insist on speaking in *our language* rather than *theirs* – the language of their interests and needs.

If we’re going to “be all things” to the people around us, in order that by “all means” some of them might come to know the Lord and join us as His followers, we need to become good listeners, and we need to be ready responders.

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Work hard!

As *good* listeners we will take the time to *get to know people*. We'll invite them to talk about themselves, their background and interests, their hopes, longings, disappointments, and fears. As *caring* listeners we'll take our friends and the things that matter to them to the Lord in prayer, asking Him for wisdom to teach them Jesus in ways specific to their interests and needs.

Then, we'll look for various means whereby we might do that – our personal testimony, for example, or the story of how a friend came to find in Jesus the hope of glory. Perhaps we will come across a book or a CD of hymns or other Christian music that we can share. Or maybe we can connect our lost friend with a Christian we know who has a similar story.

We'll need to think in terms of ongoing conversations with the lost people in our lives in order to build the relationships and credibility teaching Jesus to them requires. Pray faithfully for the lost. Take a sincere interest in them. Engage them in conversation as you can. And be ready to turn your conversations toward spiritual matters as the Lord leads.

If we really want to teach the lost people in our everyday lives, we'll have to work hard through listening, prayer, searching the Scriptures, gathering resources, and making the most of every opportunity to sow the Word of Truth into their lives. We'll need patience, grace, and a nonjudgmental attitude if we're going to keep a conversation going with our lost neighbors.

We are called to teach them, and we have been empowered for the task by God's indwelling Spirit. The responsibility for making that witness happen, however, is entirely on us.

For reflection

1. Why do you think Christians are reluctant to talk to their lost friends about the Lord?
2. Outline your own personal testimony of the difference Jesus has made in your life.
3. How can followers of Jesus encourage one another to greater faithfulness in teaching others about Jesus?

Next steps – Preparation: Begin praying daily for the lost people you will see that day. Look for opportunities to get to know them and to begin showing them the love of Jesus. Make this part of your daily life as a follower of Jesus.

4 Back to the Bottle?

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5.12

Sluggish?

The problem with the Christians to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed was that they were not quite getting to their responsibility for teaching one another and bearing witness to the lost. They had settled into the elementary principles of the faith, and they just weren't moving along.

The writer of the book of Hebrews was not questioning their salvation; he was convinced by the good works of love he had seen in them that they really did know the Lord (Heb. 6.10). But he warned them against becoming complacent, lest he be wrong about them, and they be discovered not to be followers of Christ at all.

Following Jesus is more than just starting well. If they wanted to be bold about the Lord, and not cowering before the threats of sinful people; if they were to know joy and confidence in their faith, rather than doubting and slipping back into unbelieving ways; and if they hoped to fulfill their calling to teach one another and the lost, and thus to imitate the great heroes of the faith who have gone before them, they would need to move on from "first principles" and begin taking in more of the "solid food" of faith (Heb. 6.11, 12).

They must not be sluggish, like some of them had become – hanging around the basic teachings of the faith, not willing to take up the more demanding truths of the Gospel, or to practice their faith with boldness and consistency. Such people, the writer warned, were in danger, not of falling away from the faith, but of being discovered never truly to have believed in the first place (Heb. 6.1-9).

Move on!

In spite of the evidence of real faith in his readers, the writer insisted that they move on. But before they did, they needed to revisit those basic teachings – the "milk" of Christian doctrine – once again. Because it was a sure bet they wouldn't be able to teach one another or bear witness to the lost until those basics were firmly rooted and beginning to bear even more fruit in their lives.

So what were these basic doctrines?

But first, a review

We alluded to them previously. The writer sketches those basic faith principles in Hebrews 6.1, 2, and we may summarize them succinctly. First is the *doctrine of Jesus Christ* (v. 1). You can't be a Christian and you won't be able to teach others until you understand and believe that Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man, that He fulfilled all righteousness, bore our sins in His own body on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God. From there He is advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, until the day He returns to take His Church unto Himself. By believing in *this* Jesus we are justified before God, adopted into the household and community of faith, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and set on the path of being ready to follow Jesus.

This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith; no one can be a Christian who does not confess this, and all who confess it must begin to bring their lives into increasing conformity with what Jesus teaches (Matt. 28.18-20).

That includes *repentance from sin*, the second basic principle of the faith. Repentance is an act of faith and obedience in which a believer, convicted of some sin in his life, confesses it to the Lord, puts it aside, and

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charts a course more consistent with the example of Christ and the teaching of His Word. You cannot be a Christian and *not* practice repentance. Following Jesus requires that we lay aside everything that is displeasing to Him and that we work hard, day by day, to be renewed by His Spirit into the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4.17-24; Phil. 2.12, 13).

Next is the *doctrine of the Church* – here alluded to by the reference to baptism and the ordaining of church officers (laying on of hands). If you are a Christian, you are a member of the Body of Christ. Building His Church is the Lord’s agenda, and every follower of Jesus becomes a co-laborer in that work. Each of us has something to contribute to the growth of our church and its ministry, and our job is to discover what that is and work hard to realize it (1 Cor. 12.7-11; 1 Pet. 4.10, 11).

Finally, living toward the *resurrection and eternal life* is basic to the life of faith. “What manner of people ought we to be,” Peter asked, in view of the fact that we are destined to live forever with the Lord (2 Pet. 3.11-14)? And John said the prospect of being with Jesus forever should make us eager to be pure, as He is pure (1 Jn. 3.2, 3). If we are truly followers of Jesus, then we will live *forward*, toward the coming day of resurrection and eternal life. We will prepare ourselves every day for this great homecoming, in order to make sure, when we arrive at the marriage feast of the Lamb, that we’re properly clothed in the garments He alone can supply.

Christians who live for the future don’t dawdle in the break room of faith. They’re busy and eager about the business of following Jesus, each according to the work he or she has been given to do.

These are the elementary teachings of the faith, the “milk” of belief. You can’t follow Jesus if you’re not settled in these most basic principles of Christian belief. If these are not in place and bearing fruit in your life, well, it may be time to return to the bottle once again.

For reflection

1. What are some reasons believers don’t seem to grow in the Lord like we might expect they should?
2. Should we be concerned about our fellow believers, if they don’t seem all that interested in growing in Christ? Explain.
3. What can Christians do to encourage one another to grow in the Lord?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about growing in the Lord. What do they do to keep growing? How are they able to tell when they’re making progress? How could you encourage one another to grow in the Lord?

5 Seeing is Believing

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. Hebrews 6.4-6

The meaning of faith

We need the milk of Christian faith. It's the starting point for all we believe and everything we seek in learning to follow Jesus. We need to linger a bit more over the basic principles of the Christian faith, as the writer of Hebrews referred to these in Hebrews 5.12, and sketched them in Hebrews 6.1, 2.

The question he is focusing on in this passage – a question central to his entire book – is what it actually means to *believe* in these basic principles and elementary doctrines. This is a difficult passage and can only be fully understood in the light of Hebrews 6.9-12.

Here the writer tells us how we can be confident that we actually *do* believe the things we profess. One reason many Christians have not begun to teach their fellow believers or to share the Good News of Jesus with their lost neighbors is that they've never really come to saving faith themselves. Thus, they lack the Spirit of God to empower them for witness or enable them to teach others the things of Jesus Christ. That this might have been the situation of at least *some* of those to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed is certainly possible.

Alternately, some believers may not have been *confident* about their salvation, so that they freely and happily talked about it with others. They may have been truly saved, but because they lacked assurance of salvation or outward evidences of it, they had no confidence in their ability to teach it to others.

All diligence?

Look at the cautious and tentative way the writer refers to some people who never go on to maturity or to their responsibility to teach the things of Christ. He mentions those who have been *once enlightened* in God's truth, perhaps just enough to help them see that they needed something more than what their sin-darkened lives were providing. So they came to the church, and there they tasted – just *tasted* – of the heavenly gift of salvation and became *partakers* of the Holy Spirit. Partaking in something is far different from being really part of it. I might partake of a lively conversation, by simply listening in without adding anything of my own. Am I really *part* of that conversation?

So these new church members, rather than *surrendering* to the Holy Spirit and *being filled* with Him, simply *sipped* His presence from the mature believers around them. They were *enlightened* by Gospel truth and *tasted* of the power of the Kingdom and the age to come, but they weren't being fed or sustained on any of this. If they were, if the Spirit of God had truly wrought salvation in their souls, then the *evidence* would have been visible in good works of love, increased faith in God, a hunger to know more of His promises, and diligence in seeking more of the salvation of the Lord (vv. 9-12).

In the Christian life, seeing is believing, because true faith, the faith of those who follow Jesus, is both an *inward assurance* of the things we hope for, and the *outward evidence* that those things provide the guiding focus and driving force for our lives (Heb. 11.1).

Peter said as much as well. He exhorted his readers to give all diligence to make sure – to confirm for themselves and others – that God had really saved them. In order to do this, they had to work hard at repentance and Christian growth, and not just be content to dabble in basic teaching or hang out with the redeemed (2 Pet. 1.5-11).

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What shall we take from this? Simply this: While the milk of God's Word is just that – basic, fundamental, elementary teachings that anyone who would follow Jesus must embrace – we cannot be *sure* that we have embraced those teachings until our *tasting* and *partaking* become a hunger and thirst for the Word of God, a passion for good works, and a determination to know more of everything God has to teach and intends to do through us.

Not by works, but unto them

We need solid food. Milk won't sustain us. We'll never move on to maturity in following Jesus if we refuse to get off the bottle and get on the meaty cuisine. Because only solid food is sufficient to equip us for our calling as teachers of others. And those who just don't seem to have the appetite for solid Biblical teaching need to examine themselves to make sure they're really the followers of Christ they claim to be.

This is not salvation by works; it is salvation *resulting* in works (Eph. 2.8-10). And unless our claims to believe in salvation and to want to follow Jesus begin leading to appropriate works, we'd better revisit the basics until we learn them enough to begin living *them* consistently.

For if we fall away from the *milk*, we'll never get on to maturity, never be able to fulfill our calling to teach, never follow Jesus as He intends, and we may even find ourselves disappointed and dismayed when, on that last great day, we stand before the Lord of glory Himself, only to hear Him say, "I never knew you."

For reflection

1. Is it really possible for someone to be *enlightened*, to *taste*, and to *partake* of the things of Christ, and yet not truly know the Lord? Explain.
2. Meditate on Hebrews 11.1. How would you describe the *inward* experience of true faith? What are some aspects of the *outward* evidence such faith spawns?
3. Is moving on in faith something a follower of Jesus does because of a sense of *duty* or because of *love*? Explain.

Next steps – Demonstration: What should you be looking for in your own walk with the Lord as evidence that your faith is helping you to follow Jesus more consistently? Talk with a fellow believer about this question.

6 On to Maturity

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Hebrews 5.14

Practice makes permanent

So how do we move from *believing* the basics to *living* the basics and from there on to *seeking the solid food* of Christian instruction?

This much is certain: we'll never be able to fulfill the Lord's command to teach others the things of Christ if all we ever have to talk about is the milk of faith. Our grandchildren delight to get their evening bottle, just before they go to bed. Sometimes they walk around with it as they drink, fairly reveling in the sheer joy of the milk. They'll even offer their bottle to Susie or me for a swig. They are happy to be sipping on milk, and are growing strong from it. But they'll fail to thrive as children, youth, and mature adults if all they ever do is sip happily on their milk.

Those who are maturing in the Lord, and delight to feed on the solid food of His Word, have no need to return to the milk of the faith. They have moved on from these basics and are pursuing more of Jesus in the solid food of His Word.

When the milk of Christian teaching is flowing into and fortifying our souls and bodies, we grow in the Lord. This growth is evident in lively good works, albeit, only the kind of works we might expect of a newborn believer. As we grow in the Lord, we move on to the more solid food of Biblical instruction, and take up the more mature good works, by which, the writer of Hebrews says, we can be sure that we really are saved (Heb. 6.9). These include teaching the things of Christ to others.

But what is involved in taking up those good works? Consistency! Or as the writer of Hebrews puts it, "use."

We must identify specific areas of our lives where we are *not* practicing the things we profess, and *lay aside* whatever practices do not cohere with the Gospel and *put on* whatever do. We need to put what we're learning to *use*. Paul writes about this in Ephesians 4.17-24. If we have drunk the milk of Christian doctrine and are moving on to more solid Scriptural food, our works will begin to change, and we will work hard at making sure that happens (2 Pet. 1.5-11; Phil. 2.12).

As we *learn* the things of Christ we must be careful and diligent to *live* what we're *learning*. Failure to do so will simply indicate that we haven't really learned it at all. And we won't be able to *teach* what we haven't *learned* in the first place. We've all heard the old saw, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." In the Christian faith we should rather say, "Those who can *do*, teach!"

And every one of us is called to this. It is a mark of every follower of Jesus Christ that he or she is ready to speak about Jesus and His Kingdom at every opportunity.

A rail line to maturity!

What happens as we put into practice even the simplest, most basic teaching of God's Word? We begin to learn, by reason of use, how to distinguish good from evil, truth from error, and right from wrong. The more solid fuel we put in the boiler of our soul, the more spiritual steam is generated to energize faithful Christian living. Each act of obedience, be it ever so small, drives a spike in the ties of a rail line toward maturity. We become more exercised in *knowing* what is good and true by simply *doing* whatever good and true things we're able to in every situation of our lives. Consistent, faithful practice at doing good gets us the traction of truth on the rails of maturity, so that we grow strong and make progress in the life of good works, just as God

intends (Eph.2.8-10).

The more we feed on the solid food of God's Word in this way, the more we will mature in the Lord, and desire more of the solid food God has prepared for us.

Miss Manners was once asked by a high school girl preparing for her first prom how to walk in high heels. Her answer is most appropriate for our subject: "Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot." In other words, one small but sure step at a time. Every next step of obedience is a growth step, in that by it we put into practice whatever we are learning, and so prove ourselves to be followers of Jesus Christ. This is the way we process the milk and meat of the Word into a life of good works in obedience to our King.

Getting ready for the solid food

As we continue feeding on the solid food, the good works and acts of faith it nurtures take the form of deeds and words. And part of the words indicating growth in the Lord will be teaching our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and reaching out to the lost with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

The milk of God is not sufficient for this, although certainly eager new believers can bear effective witness to the Lord. But consistent teaching and witness-bearing, and living those good works which evidence the presence of Christ in us, is the fruit of solid Christian doctrine, and solid Christian doctrine is *only* for those in whom the milk of the Word is doing its work and creating a hunger for the more solid food of Scripture.

What about you? Do you believe in the basic doctrines of Christian faith with such conviction that they are creating in you a hunger for the more solid food of the Word of God. And are you walking "right foot, left foot" to work out your salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12, 13)?

If so, then take heart: you're walking the path which the followers of Jesus have walked since the earliest days of the Christian movement.

For reflection

1. What kind of discipline do we need to adopt in order to get into the solid food of God's Word?
2. Will it do us any good to press on in the solid food if we're not yet making good use of the milk of God's Word? Explain.
3. How can we know that we are maturing in the Lord? What *evidence* of faith (Heb. 11.1) should we expect to see?

Next steps – Preparation: What's one thing you might do to improve your feeding on all of Scripture – the milk and the solid food? Talk with a pastor or church leader about this question.

7 Solid Food

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Hebrews 5.14

Into the deep water of truth

The writer of Hebrews is galloping along at a fairly brisk pace in his epistle, presenting the claims of Jesus Christ to be our great High Priest and Savior. He's trying to keep his readers, who, because of persecution, have begun thinking about going back to Judaism, from falling away from what they have believed. He knows they're stuck on the *milk* of Christian instruction, and that this is not sufficient to help them endure as followers of Jesus in the face of trials. They needed to reaffirm what they had heard by putting into practice everything they already knew, for only then would they be able to move on to the kind of maturity that stays the course for Jesus.

Apparently they were not strong enough to encourage one another to persevere in their faith and hang in there for Jesus (chapter 3). Rather than teach one another and bear witness to their persecutors, they were starting to lapse into quietude and to regress into unbelief. If they didn't check this, they would be found out not to have been saved in the first place.

But they needed more than the milk of Christian teaching to persevere as followers of Jesus. They needed to learn the deeper truths of Scripture in order to hold firm their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, come what may. Yet the evidence was that they were not quite ready for it.

So, in chapters 5 and 6, the writer interrupted his eloquent defense of the doctrine of Christ to chide his readers for not teaching and encouraging one another, and for shrinking back from their profession rather than continuing to proclaim the faith. Then, having re-established their footing in the faith and encouraged them with the evidence of their assurance, in chapter 7 he launched into the deep water of the life of faith, fully confident that his readers – real Christians all – would be able to follow along.

An eighth-letter four-letter word

He began to serve them, in other words, the solid food of faith, for this solid food was what they needed in order to encourage one another in love and good works (Heb. 10.24), to follow in the footsteps of great saints (Heb. 11), and to stand firm in their faith as witnesses for Christ (Heb. 12.1, 2).

In our day *doctrine* has become an eight-letter, four-letter word. Ask a believer what his favorite doctrine is and he'll probably wrinkle his nose and decline to respond. Some pastors openly rail against doctrine as not what the Church needs these days. Apparently doctrine was what the Church needed in the first century, but now we don't seem to require it as much?

The Christians who helped to found this country feasted on doctrine, powerful sermons of great depth and resonance by the likes of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Cotton Mather, and John Witherspoon. Those colonial believers sailed their vessels of faith through depths of spiritual truth, and found there the vision and courage to declare themselves a nation under God, and not under tyranny, and to make that declaration stick.

Without sound doctrine, consistently taught, faithfully believed, and diligently lived, we shall not have the strength to persevere in faith and hold firm to the end our convictions concerning Jesus Christ.

Feed on the solid food!

Friends, if your pastors won't feed you on the solid food of Christian doctrine, they don't deserve the title.

You Ought to Be Teachers!

Encourage them to preach the great doctrines of the Christian faith, so that you can feed on those great truths, and bear the fruit they can produce in lives of holiness, witness, and mutual edification.

Mature Christians hunger for solid food, deep and mysterious doctrines of faith that re-focus our minds, renew our hearts, refurbish our consciences, and revive our lives in true witness for Jesus Christ. Their sails filled with the truths of God's Word, they are ready for every opportunity to encourage a fellow believer or speak the truth in love to an unsaved friend. This is because the truth on which they journey, which fuels their souls and fills their sails, cannot be contained. It will well up, overflow, and issue forth in rivers of living water, so that we cannot *not* teach the things of Christ to the people to whom He sends us.

You will not be able to fulfill your calling to teach others and to bear witness for the Lord until you begin feeding consistently on the great doctrines of God's Word. Feed yourself on the Word of God, daily reading, meditating, and going deeper into the great truths of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. When the Word of God is truly the joy and rejoicing of your heart (Jer. 15.16), you'll begin to know more of the benefit of that solid food as you teach and share the Good News of Jesus with others.

For reflection

1. Why do you suppose many Christians have a negative attitude toward doctrine? What *is* doctrine?
2. How would you describe the relationship between learning sound doctrine and fulfilling your calling to teach others?
3. What could you do to help ensure you had a more steady diet of doctrine in your walk with the Lord?

Next steps – Preparation: How might you improve your time in the Word of God to make sure you are always going deeper, learning more, and making good use of the solid food of God's Word? Talk with some of your fellow believers about this question.

You Ought to Be Teachers!

For reflection or discussion

1. Why does the writer of Hebrews insist that *every* follower of Jesus should teach Him to others?
2. What are some reasons Christians *don't* teach Jesus to one another or their lost neighbors?
3. Why is the solid food of Scripture so important? How can we tell when we are truly learning the solid food of God's Word?
4. Why is the *next steps* idea so important to growing in the Lord?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you working to put that lesson to work in your life?

Prayer:

You Ought to Be Teachers!

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.

You Ought to Be Teachers!