

YOU OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS!

DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES 2



Disciple-making is part of discipleship.

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A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

You Ought to Be Teachers!

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Disciples Making Disciples Part 2
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Welcome to *You Ought to Be Teachers!*

Jesus' mandate to all disciples is that they should make disciples as part of their calling.

While some have received a gift of teaching and serve in some official capacity where they use that gift, all believers are called to teach others – both other believers and our lost neighbors.

But we need to make sure we're feeding on solid food if we're going to teach others to be disciples of the Lord.

In this part of our study, "Disciples Making Disciples," we'll examine more closely the call to teach that falls to every follower of Jesus Christ – what it is, what it entails, and how to get ready for it.

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study, *Disciples Making Disciples*, that you might grow in Him and His calling 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

Every Christian is called to follow Jesus as His disciple. That means we walk the path of obedience Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6), do the good works of ministry Jesus did (Eph. 2.8-10), and proclaim and teach the Kingdom Jesus came to bring near (Acts 1.1-3, 8). As disciples of Jesus we are actively engaged in making others disciples as well (Matt. 28.18-20), by the witness of our lives and words, and both with those who do not know Jesus and those who do.

So we need to prepare ourselves each day for this work of being and making disciples, so that we will be ready to follow Jesus wherever He may lead us in building His Church and seeking His Kingdom.

And most of us have a good bit of work to do in this regard.

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 is not simply a matter of *spiritual gifts* or *available time*? What if it is a matter of *duty*? What if being a teacher of the things of Christ is simply part of what's involved in *being a disciple* – 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 disciple of Jesus Christ*. To *follow* Jesus means that we are ready to make the most of every opportunity to *teach* Jesus to others. We who are disciples are also called to make disciples – no excuses, no exceptions.

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 or reading this letter – every Christian – has 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* context 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.

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We are called to teach *one another*, as Paul explains us in Colossians 3.16 and Romans 15.14. One of the most important contributors to growth as a disciple 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 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 placeholders

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 – you and I and all the other disciples 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 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. Watch the video, download the worksheet, and begin working your arena of ministry and teaching.

2 For Edification

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.
Ephesians 4.29

Getting started

Every believer is a disciple of Jesus Christ, and every disciple is called to teach other disciples 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. 5.12; 10.24).

And you ought to expect other disciples of the Lord to build you up as well, as you receive their witness, encouragement, counsel, advice, and guidance. We're all called to teach one another, using our words to build up the members of the Body of Christ, and thus to edify the Body of Christ as a whole.

This is not an option. It simply comes with the calling to be a disciple. Follow Jesus; be a teacher. We are all charged with the duty of teaching one another in the church, for the edification of its members. The question is thus not whether we ought to teach, but how faithful and effective we are in this calling. 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 continues in chapter 5 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 we get *started* teaching, the better we'll *become* at it.

The goal of our teaching

There are a few matters 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 difficult to build-up our fellow disciples. Our teaching should, like Paul's, aim at helping other disciples become complete in Jesus Christ (Col. 1.28).

Peter likewise 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).

To be like Jesus

Let's remember what we said in the first part of this study on being and making disciples. 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. It means “putting on” the Lord Jesus and leaving no room for merely fleshly interests (Rom. 13.14). It might be helpful here briefly to review those roles.

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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 disciples 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 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, nurture them in eternal life, and guard them from danger. If we're growing as Christians, shouldn't we be *shepherds*, too? And shouldn't we be teaching one another to be shepherds?

And, of course, Jesus was a *sower* 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.

Resources for teaching one another

So we need to know what we're trying to accomplish as we teach our fellow believers. And what we're trying to accomplish is that we might all increase in the prize of 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 (Heb. 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 ("baptisms" 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 these only. We need to move on to "solid food" – the more difficult and demanding teachings of Scripture and the doctrines of Christian faith. This is the teaching that helps us to appreciate the broad scope and unfathomable power and joy of our great salvation. As we grow in the Lord, and as we encourage other disciples in their walk with and work for the Lord, we will together become more fruitful agents of grace in our own Personal Mission Fields. Thus, our great salvation will have greater effects on the world day by day.

Our calling to teach other disciples requires that we grow in both the milk and the solid food of God's Word. Only then can we teach one another so that we might grow together 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 your friend tried to fulfill this calling? How have you?

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 disciples of Jesus Christ 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. As J. I. Packer wrote in his book about growing older, *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, there are always new things we can learn and new people we can lead in being and making disciples.

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 witnesses to the lost 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. Good works are the ways we show Christ’s love to the people around us, so we should be zealous to do them and always ready for every opportunity to show the love of Jesus to the people in our Personal Mission Field (Tit. 2.14; 3.1, 8, 14).

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 about that hope (1 Pet. 3.15).

Second, we need 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 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. We'll want to talk often with people, doing our best to keep the focus on them, so that we might learn better how to share the Good News of Jesus.

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, 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. They were disciples who were neither growing in the Lord nor helping other disciples to grow in Him.

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. 6.9, 10). But he warned them against becoming complacent, lest he and they should be found to be wrong about them, and they be discovered not to be followers of Christ at all.

Following Jesus is more than just starting well. "Getting saved" is not an end-point for salvation, but it's the beginning. If we as disciples want to grow in the Lord and be bold about Him, not cowering before the threats of sinful people; if we are to know joy and confidence in our faith, rather than doubting and slipping back into unbelieving ways; and if we hope to fulfill our calling and teach one another and the lost, and thus imitate the great heroes of the faith who have gone before us, we will need to move on from "first principles" and begin taking in more of the "solid food" of faith (Heb. 6.11, 12).

We 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!

Despite the evidence of real faith in his readers, the writer insisted that they must 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.

The basic doctrines of faith are the essential foundation on which we grow our lives as disciples. We want that foundation to be sure, sure enough that we are never shaken from it, and that we can teach it confidently to others. The basic doctrines of Christian faith may be basic, but they are indispensable.

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 the righteousness God requires of people, 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 upholding the cosmos by His powerful Word and 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

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community of faith, indwelt by the Spirit of God, conveyed into the Kingdom of God (Col. 1.13), and set on the path of being ready to follow Jesus.

This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. There is no other Name given among men under heaven by which we *must* be saved (Acts 4.12). No one can be a Christian who does not confess this, and all who confess it will “go on to perfection” (Heb. 6.1) and 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 (v. 1). 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 takes up a course in life 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, v. 2). 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). Disciples are not lone rangers; we need one another, and we are to contribute to one another’s growth in the Lord by our example, teaching, and encouragement (Heb. 10.24).

Finally, living toward the *resurrection and eternal life* is basic to the life of faith (v. 2). “What manner of people ought we to be,” Peter asked, since 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, 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. Paul said that he was always pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ, and that all who were mature in the Lord were of precisely that mind (Phil. 3.14, 15).

These are the foundational doctrines of Christian faith. All disciples understand and embrace these doctrines; and they are the foundation on which we build our lives and churches as holy temples unto the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 6.19; Eph. 2.19-22). Christians who live for future glory – there and then *and* here and now – 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 they’ve 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. Not to remain on the bottle, but to make certain that your foundation for being and making disciples is sure.

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 ourselves, if we 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?

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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 as disciples of 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 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: “But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Here the writer tells us how we can be confident that we *do* believe the things we profess, and thus are true disciples of Jesus, and able to help others grow as disciples. One reason many who profess to believe in Jesus 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 come to saving faith themselves. Thus, they lack the Spirit of God to empower them for witness or to 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 be *confident* about their salvation, so that they freely and happily talk about it with others. They may have been truly saved, but because they lack assurance of salvation or outward evidences of it, they had no confidence in their ability to teach it to others.

All diligence?

Look, in Hebrews 6.4-6, 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, perhaps by merely being in the presence of those in whom the Spirit dwells. Partaking of 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 are disciples of Jesus, is

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both an *inward assurance* of the things we hope for, and the *outward evidence* that grows and issues from that inner assurance (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. 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).

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 be a disciple of Jesus must embrace – we cannot be *sure* that we have embraced those teachings until our *tasting* and *partaking* become hungering and thirsting for the Word of God, issuing in 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 should examine themselves to make sure they’re really the followers of Christ they claim to be (2 Cor. 13.5).

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

For if we fail to master the *milk* of discipleship, 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 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 be more consistent as a disciple of Jesus?

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

Every disciple of Jesus is called to grow in the Lord, to press on toward maturity in Him, and to encourage and assist other disciples to do the same. 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. Little children delight to get their evening bottle, just before they go to bed. Sometimes they may walk around with it as they drink, fairly reveling in the sheer joy of the milk. They'll even offer their bottle to a parent 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, moving on to the more solid food of Biblical instruction, we 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."

The challenge is to identify specific areas of our lives where we are *not* practicing the things we profess. There we *lay aside* whatever practices do not cohere with the Gospel and *put on* those that do. In other words, we need to make *use* of what we are learning from the solid food of God's Word.

Paul writes about this in Ephesians 4.17-24. When we have added to the milk of Christian doctrine, feeding on 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). Increasingly, we will "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ, and the works He did, we will do as well.

As we *learn* the things of Christ, we must be careful and diligent to *live* what we're learning, to put our learning to good use in loving our neighbors as ourselves. Failure to do so will indicate that we haven't really learned 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 disciple of Jesus Christ that he or she is ready to speak about Jesus and His Kingdom at every opportunity, ready that is, to make disciples of others (Matt. 28.18-20).

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

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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. The more also we will grow assured of the reality of our faith, and bear the evidence of it in good works (Heb. 11.1).

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 – offering those around them a swig of the milk they've come to know. 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 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 should we adopt 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? Begin today, and keep it up daily.

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

In chapters 1-4, the writer of Hebrews was galloping along at a brisk pace in his epistle, presenting the claims of Jesus Christ to be our great High Priest and Savior and His superiority over the old faith of the readers' Jewish forebears. He was trying to keep his readers, who, because of persecution, had begun thinking about going back to Judaism, from falling away from what they had come to believe. He knew they were stuck on the milk of Christian instruction, and that this was 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, not by slinking back from their confession, 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 and encourage 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 if they were to hold firm their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, come what may (Heb. 5). 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 shrinking back from their profession rather than continuing to live and proclaim the faith. The disciples needed to press on in their own walk with the Lord, so that they would be able to teach one another and help their fellow disciples stand fast in their confession.

Then, having re-established their footing in the faith and encouraged them with the evidence of their assurance, in chapter 7 the writer launched into the deep water of the life of faith, fully confident that his readers – real disciples all – would be able to follow along.

An eight-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 to grow in their faith and 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 as witnesses for Christ (Heb. 12.1, 2).

If we feel our own faith faltering, or if we've become too comfortable with just the basics of belief, we need to move on to the sound doctrine and solid food that alone can help us to become disciples who are making disciples.

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?

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. More likely, we will be tossed about and carried about by enticing but false winds of teaching, that will drive us off course

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in our journey with the Lord. Granted, sound doctrine can be tough sailing – “hard to explain” and understand (Heb. 5.11) – but that does not excuse the mature disciple from pressing on to learn it.

Feed on the solid food!

We need to hear, understand, embrace, and feed on the great doctrines of the Christian faith, so that we can grow strong in the Lord and the power of His might, and bear the fruit sound doctrine can produce in lives of holiness, witness, and mutual edification. Especially, we need to be instructed in the glories and greatness of the Kingdom of God, and of life lived under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, taking every thought captive for obedience to Jesus, restoring the reconciled world, making all things new, and making disciples as we are going on in life.

Mature Christians hunger for solid food, deep and mysterious doctrines of faith that re-focus our minds, refresh our hearts, refurbish our consciences, revamp our vision, and revive our lives in true witness for Jesus Christ. Filled and nourished with the truths of God’s Word, we will be 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 we journey, which fuels our souls and fills our 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.

We will not be able to fulfill our calling to teach others and to bear witness for the Lord until we begin feeding consistently on the great doctrines of God’s Word. Feed on the Word of God, daily reading, meditating, and going deeper into the great truths of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Search out reliable teachers from the past and present, whose writings can bring you through the deep waters of sound doctrine into the brighter light of a richer, fuller faith. Find some fellow disciples who will study with you. Talk often with Christian friends about what you’re learning, and give praise and thanks to God as your understanding of our great salvation grows.

When the Word of God is truly the joy and rejoicing of our heart (Jer. 15.16), we’ll begin to know more of the savor and power of that solid food, and we’ll be more ready and able to 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 steadier 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.

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For reflection or discussion

1. Why should we expect every disciple of Jesus to be a teacher?
2. What keep disciples from fulfilling that expectation?
3. What can you do to bolster your diet of the solid food of sound doctrine?
4. How would you expect growing in the solid food of sound doctrine to show affect your walk with and work for 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:

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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.

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Thank you.

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