

Just as our physical bodies must be constantly fed and continually trained to remain strong and healthy, so also believers must train spiritually or they will regress and need again to start with the basics. This appears to have been the problem with the audience of the letter to the Hebrews. The author has to warn them by describing their condition to them.

I. *The regression of the author's audience:*

1. *They had become dull of hearing (5:11).*

Since they had become believers by hearing the word, it was a serious matter to become reluctant to listen. The challenge for the author was not his topic, but the state of the believers.

2. *They had become in need of teachers rather than being teachers (5:12a).*

In time every believer should mature sufficiently to pass on to others what they have learned. But these believers had regressed, and now needed to be taught again the ABCs of the foundational truths of what God had spoken, especially concerning the things of Christ (cf. 6:1).

3. *They had become in need of spiritual milk rather than solid food (5:12b).*

The milk / solid food analogy would have been familiar (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1–4). Spiritually the maturity of the believer affects what he or she can digest. It is not dependent upon intelligence or accumulated knowledge, but spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14). These readers had been intelligent enough to understand earlier and had the facts available to them. But they were now acting like infants in need of being fed milk rather than adults taking solid food. By failing to nourish themselves spiritually (reluctance hearers of the Word), they had returned to a state of needing milk.

If you are not doing what you need to do to grow spiritually, you will regress spiritually. Train or regress, grow or wither.

II. *The maturity the author's audience should have shown:*

1. *They should have been experienced in righteous living, rather than being milk-drinking infants (5:13).*

The person who lives on milk is acting like an infant, and an infant obviously lacks in experience. The readers are acting as though “not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness” or “unskilled in the word about righteousness.” The readers should have been well-acquainted with God’s word in regard to living a righteous, God-pleasing life — what it said and how to apply it. Especially the book of Proverbs, but also the letters of Paul contain this same exhortation.

The mature believer, the one who has grown and is growing, is ever learning and reviewing the Word of God to learn how to live. A lack of concern about righteous living and disinterest in learning these truths will set you back to the infancy stage and the need for such topics as listed in 6:1–2. Heading in that direction is a dangerous indicator of what the true heart condition may be.

2. *They should have maintained the habits of maturity that equipped them to discern good and evil (5:14).*

Mature believers have developed the habit of regularly considering God’s Word and its application to life. They have become trained in their abilities to correctly perceive things on a spiritual plain. It is just like an athlete who gets trained in practice, whose “habits” then are revealed in the game. The mature believer is able to distinguish good and evil and will choose the good and avoid the evil. The author’s audience had been doing well (cf. 10:32–33), but had grown “dull of hearing” and were now not distinguishing the evil tempting them.

Do not slack off from spiritual training. Be on guard against a reluctance to put God’s word into practice. Do more than read the Bible, digest it and make it part of your life. Become trained and ready to make the proper choices in life.

Questions for further reflection:

- Paul uses the same figure of milk and solid food in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4. How does he describe the condition of the Corinthian believers in these verses? What particularly marked them as not ready for “solid food”?
- Not everyone is gifted as a teacher (1 Corinthians 12:29), nor should everyone strive to obtain such a position. Nevertheless what should every believer be able to do (1 Peter 3:15)? Are you able to do so? If not, what do you need to be equipped? What else might be implied by passages such as 1 Thessalonians 1:6–7)?
- Evaluate your own interaction with the Bible. In what ways have you recently considered how to apply God’s word to your life? Could you share this with others? What might you need to improve your “training”?