

All I Want to Know

Hebrews 5:11-6:3 (NIV)

¹¹ We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. ¹ Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.

What are your thoughts on continuing education? Should everyone always be pursuing some form of continuing education because, hey, there's always more to learn? Is there a limit of how much education should be pursued? What if continuing education is not pursued? Think of the doctors you see. What if they had never read any new science journals or attended any seminars or never again attended a class on medicine since graduating? Would you feel that you are in the best hands? Would they know about the latest medication or surgeries that are less invasive, new vaccines for diseases, new treatments? What if your barber or your beautician did not study any techniques or haircuts since they got their license? So much for a modern haircut or trying something new. What if your mechanic refused to look at car manuals past 1984? Probably not helpful to take your hybrid to him.

These examples include techniques that change and new information that comes forward. What about facts that don't change? What about when it comes to learning about God? What about your pastor? Should I be continuing my education for my profession? What about for you as a Christian? Should you be continuing your education in God?

The author of this letter to the Hebrew Christians wants to deepen the knowledge and faith of his audience specifically on the topic of Jesus being our Great High Priest, a priest better than any human priest, a priest who lives forever, a priest that fulfills all our needs, and even sacrifices himself once for all to make us perfect, a priest who takes our sins away forever by his blood. Yet as he begins this topic he sadly acknowledges, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand." (verse 11) The Hebrew Christians don't want to continue their education about God.

And it's not as if the issue is simply that they don't have the desire to learn. Since they aren't learning, their knowledge is going away. They are losing knowledge about God. The writer assesses the reality of their situation: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" (verse 12) These Hebrew Christians should have enough knowledge to be teaching others God's Word, but instead they have atrophied in their faith and knowledge of God to the point of needing the elementary truths of God's Word. They need milk, like an infant. They needed the basics retaught to them because they are losing them, they have atrophied in their faith. Since this is so, how can the author build on what they have lost and lead them into a more mature Christian faith?

Let's acknowledge a couple of things. First of all, we are the same before God. The same Great High Priest Jesus lived for us, sacrificed himself for us, shed his blood for us, removed our sins from us and perfected us. This is the foundation of our faith. We are equally saved, equal heirs of heaven. None of us are greater than another or before God, no matter the talent, the knowledge, the memory, the years of service, etc. Secondly, we recognize that there are differences among us when it comes to the maturity of our faith. Some here – both young and old – are learning the elementary truths of God's Word, "of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." (verses 1-2) This is the milk. And this is great! This is needed! Others – also young and old alike – are going deeper, diving into a topic like what it means that Jesus is our Great High Priest, as the writer to the Hebrew Christians tells us. This is the solid food. More application. More understanding. We still have equal status before God, but we are also growing and maturing in our faith through both milk and solid food. As we grow up, we enjoy a variety in our diet and don't just live on milk.

What the author of this letter to the Hebrew Christians is getting at is: What is your attitude when it comes to learning more about God? Are you content with what you have learned and now no longer strive to learn anything? Is your attitude "Jesus loves me this I know and that's all I want to know"? Do we think that at confirmation or the end of a Bible Information Class that I have learned everything; I'm done; I've graduated? Is my faith life, my knowledge of God, on a senior slide where I try to do the bare minimum possible as a follower of Christ, not really ever trying to learn more? Am I trying to see how minimally I can practice my faith while still being able to call myself a Christian?

At the end of the day, if I'm not going forward in my faith and knowledge of God, I'm going backwards, like a bicyclist who takes months or years off of training but then tries to do the Tour of Utah. During that race the bicyclist is going to realize that their body has lost its conditioning. They have slowly and, until now, unnoticeably become weaker.

It's the same for our Christian faith. With our knowledge of God, we are either growing deeper in it as we study God and his Word or we are letting it go atrophied, letting it get weaker, and we don't realize how much we've lost until the time comes when our faith in God is challenged and we are out of breath spiritually, overwhelmed and pressed down, aching and uncomfortable.

So, are you saying that I should take eight years of Bible school and become a pastor? I don't have the time for all that study of God's Word. The writer to the Hebrew Christians is not saying that all of us should be pastors when he says, "By this time you ought to be teachers." (verse 12) To be a teacher, you don't need a formal degree or education, but you do need knowledge and people. Think about those whom God has put in your life. Think of your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, your friends, your relatives, your coworkers, your neighbors. Have you ever taught any of them the elementary truths of God's Word, shared with them a bit of God? Have you ever explained to them what God has done for you, that he lived a perfect life for you, that he took your sins away on the cross, that because of what he did that you will go to heaven and live with him forever? You may not have taught that Jesus is our Great High Priest from the book of Hebrews, but you taught. You shared knowledge of God our Savior with them.

To teach this, we needed knowledge, knowledge you already have. You know God. You know what God has done for you. You know that he lived a perfect life for you as your substitute. You know he shed his blood for you so that he would not hold your sins against you. But we can go deeper. We want to go deeper, to learn and apply truths about God like how Jesus is our Great High Priest and that we don't need anyone else to stand in that place or serve as our mediator, our sacrifice, our perfection before God. To get there, we need to continue in our education of God. If we are not challenging ourselves to learn more about God and what he has done for us, we will grow weaker in our faith. There is no standstill when it comes to our faith and knowledge of God. If we are not growing, we are losing. Jesus gave us this expectation to continue to grow in our faith after learning the elementary truths when he told us to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a) Thus, God encourages us, "Let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity." (verse 1)

So, the question is: how am I growing and not standing still in my faith in God? How am I moving from milk to solid food in my faith life? You being here this morning is one way. Here you get God's Word. That's what I'm trying to do with each sermon is to give you milk and solid food. That's why I continue to read my Bible for myself and not just for Bible studies or sermons. That's why I meet with a group of pastors once a month – to study and have the Holy Spirit deepen our faith and understanding of him. That's why I go to pastors' conference three times a year. That's why I read books and even take formal continuing education classes.

That's me, but how can you deepen your faith in God and learn more about him? Being at church is one way. Since you are already coming here on Sunday mornings, will you also take the time to contemplate the questions that go along with the sermon each week? Will you take home the bulletin and reread the Bible passage, ponder them, apply them to your life? Will you give that extra hour on Sunday mornings to come to Adult Bible study or to Sunday School? And if you're the parent, will you set the tone and expectation of growing in your faith and understanding of God for your children that if you bring them to Sunday School that you go to Bible study as well because it's just as important for you to grow in your faith and knowledge of God as it is for them? Is your Sunday evening open to take the Bible Information Class? Yes, it is the class that primarily teaches the elementary truths of God's Word, but by studying them the Holy Spirit will build you up to be comforted in what God has done for you in new ways, ways that others are built up that maybe you never thought of before. Will you go in depth on the Wednesday night Life of Christ Bible study? Will you pick up one of the *Meditations* daily devotional books and use them? Will you subscribe to the on-line daily devotions from our national church body on wels.net or watch the Time of Grace videos on the weekdays? Will you start a Bible reading plan? Will you look at the Bible studies online – through our e-mail newsletter, through WELS Interactive Faith? Will you peruse the little church library here and pick up something there to continue in your education of God and grow in your faith?

We came here for the Bread of Life. We came for Jesus. Jesus wants us to feast on him each and every day through his Word. Whenever you hear, read, and study God's Word, we are feasting on him as the Bread of Life and the Holy Spirit is working on us. He brings us to a deeper understanding and faith in God as he works through the Word. It's not about how many Bible verses you can quote or deep theological discussions you can have or how many hours you can log in Bible classes. It's about growing to know more about God and what he does for you and all people so that you can apply God and his truth to your life and to the lives of others. There is always more to learn. So, take in more of the Bread of Life and the Holy Spirit will mature you and me in the faith and knowledge of God. Amen.