

# Discerning True Believers from False Part 1

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 5:11-14  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 15, 2017

It is, once again, a great privilege that we have to immerse ourselves in the word of God and I would like to do that by taking you to Hebrews 5 as we continue to make our way through this amazing epistle and this morning we will be looking at verses 11 through 14. This will be the first of a three-part series on the idea of discerning true believers from false and this is actually a very serious problem in the church today. The writer to the Hebrews continues to deal with this.

It was a problem then as it is today. In fact, they had what you might call borderline unbelievers or you could say borderline believers, maybe that would be more accurate, and they had what I would call Christian unbelievers, "Christian" in quotes, both of whom had attached themselves to the church in some superficial way. The borderline believers were the Jewish people that were right on the edge of placing their faith in Christ but they had not wholeheartedly committed themselves to him and made a clean break with Judaism. And they also had what I call Christian unbelievers, they were Christian in name only, those who had made some shallow profession of faith, perhaps even enthusiastically, they had dabbled in some of the truths of the Gospel, believing various aspects of it, but likewise they had not fully committed themselves to Christ as Savior and Lord and in both cases, they were unreconciled to God; they were unregenerate, unsaved, guilty and condemned before a holy God. In both cases, they were self-deceived and they had deceived, no doubt, many in relationship with them. And I'm sure when this letter was read to them, they were very uncomfortable, especially in chapters 5 and 6 that speaks to this issue.

And in the text this morning, we discover that the writer makes a third warning to these kinds of people and in so doing he gives us better insight in discerning between true and false believers. Remember that there was the first warning that was made in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4, where he warned them, "You're not paying close attention to what you're being taught concerning the Gospel," so he said, "you're drifting away from what you've heard. You are neglecting so great a salvation." And then again in chapter 3, beginning in verse 7 through verse 19, he warns them that, "You're like your ancestors were in the wilderness that hardened their hearts against the truth." They were guilty of that deadly sin of unbelief. They had never come to a place, these people in this first century, they had never come to a place of genuine brokenness over their sin and so because of this, their heart had become increasingly hardened to the things of God and they were tempted to fall away from the truth, fall back into Judaism. And now the author addresses these unbelieving Jews once again in a third warning.

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Let me pick it up beginning in verse 9 and here he continues his argument to try to persuade them to understand the superiority of Christ. He says,

9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. 11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Now, many will argue that this is being addressed to true believers but I do not find that argument compelling given the theme of Hebrews and the context of which this passage is written. Remember, the recurring theme in Hebrews is the deity, the superiority of Christ, and therefore the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant, the supremacy of Christianity over Judaism. This epistle is not a contrast between immature and mature believers. That is not the focus. It's a contrast between unbelieving Jews and believing Christians, between Judaism and Christianity. And without an understanding of this distinction, the epistle cannot be properly interpreted and you'll run into all kinds of problems especially trying to explain chapter 6, verses 1 through 8, where many people go to to tell us that believers can lose their salvation when in fact that section is not talking about believers at all. It's for this reason that I intend to exposit verse 11 here in chapter 5 through verse 12 of chapter 6 in three parts, each of which speaks to the issue of the process of spiritual maturation and this is going to provide us, again, great insight into the matter of discerning between genuine believers and imitation believers.

Part 1 that we'll look at today in chapter 5 verses 11 through 14, is going to speak of unbelievers who become dull of hearing. And then part 2 that we'll look at the next time we're together, we'll look at verses 1 through 8 of chapter 6 where, again, it speaks of unbelievers who will fall away from the truth. And then part 3 of chapter 6 verses 9 through 12, we'll look at believers who by contrast love and imitate Christ.

Now, the combined warnings that the author gives us in this epistle provide us with a composite picture of the character and the conduct of an unbeliever. Again, as you look at all of them, an unbeliever just simply refuses to pay close attention to what they are

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taught concerning the Gospel so they gradually drift away from it. They neglect the salvation available to them and then because of the deceitfulness of their sin that has convinced them that they are right with God when the very opposite is true, their heart becomes increasingly hardened to the truths of the Gospel that presents their true condition. So what happens next? Well, they become dull of hearing. That's what we'll look at today and in this passage we see at least three characteristics of what this actually looks like in the borderline believer and the Christian unbeliever, if you will.

They are spiritually and doctrinally three things: 1. apathetic, secondly, they are ignorant, and third, they are undiscerning and so they eventually fall back into Judaism. Before we look at this, may I say that we see this pattern all the time even in evangelical circles today, especially among our young adults. Here's how it works. They get really excited to hear the Gospel and they make some profession of faith but it's phony. It's not real. And the deceitfulness of sin convinces them that they are right with God but they are not and so their heart becomes increasingly hardened to the truth of the Gospel that would really present to them the reality of their lost condition and so eventually they become dull of hearing, they become apathetic, they grow willfully ignorant and undiscerning and what do they do? They fall back into whatever ungodly belief system that is appealing to their flesh, maybe it's agnosticism, atheism; maybe they fall into the pluralism cult, so to speak, or some cult; or perhaps worst of all, they fall into cultural Christianity which is equally damning.

Now, please understand, even those of us who know and love Christ, even true believers can experience seasons in our life where these things are characteristics of us, where our sin causes us to be apathetic and willfully ignorant and undiscerning. That can infect the soul and bring about all manner of misery. Just think, I mean, from the grievous sins of King David to Peter's denial of Christ, you have examples of this all through Scripture. But, dear friends, these things will not be the life dominating pattern of the life of a believer. They may have seasons of this but it will not be the life dominating pattern of their life. No true believer will be able to stand very long out of fellowship with the lover of their soul. The guilt is too great. The misery is too painful and the Father's discipline is too motivating. Haven't we all been there? Like David, eventually they will confess like he did in Psalm 32, eventually we all say as David did, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." He goes on to talk about how that the Lord restored to him the joy of his salvation.

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But, dear friends, when a person's life is characterized by apathy towards the relationship with the living God, when it is characterized by kind of a willful ignorance of God's word and his will and is characterized by just a lack of discernment, they just simply can't see right and wrong, error and truth, then that person has no basis to make the claim that they have been made a new creature in Christ and they are walking in newness of life. And sadly, these characteristics describe, I fear, the vast majority of evangelicalism today, folks who claim they love Christ but they live as if he doesn't even exist; people who live a Christ-less Christianity, a cultural Christianity, one that is bereft, really, of spiritual life, of spiritual power. They have no passion, no discernment, no joy, no burden for the lost, no hungering and thirsting for righteousness, no longing to see the Lord. They just float along in their life.

Now, for the most part, it's easy for us to discern unbelievers. I mean, some of them make it very clear with their life and that language that they want nothing to do with Christ, with Christianity, the church, the Bible, all of those types of things. For example, you show me a man who wants nothing to do with a solid church and I'll show you a man who wants nothing to do with Christ. But when people claim to be Christians and they attach themselves to a church yet demonstrate by their life and their language that they are apathetic, they are willfully ignorant, they are undiscerning, we would really be foolish not to question the genuineness of their faith. So this passage really serves as a warning to those Jews who fell into those categories. And by the way, it also served as a rich encouragement for those people to whom it did not apply and we need to remember that. It should be a warning to those of you who might see yourself described here but if you see that your life and in your heart that these things are not true of you, that the opposite is true, then you should be greatly encouraged.

So let's examine the text more closely. Notice verse 11, he says, "Concerning him we have much to say," the "him" refers back to Melchizedek, "and it is hard to explain," he says, "since you have become dull of hearing." You will recall that as we discussed a little bit last week, in Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek, whose name means "righteous king," was the king of Salem, ancient Jerusalem. He was a priest, the text says, of God most high. He was a type of Christ. His priesthood and his kingship pictured or prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ who was the superior antetype, the perfect priest, the eternal king. You will recall there in verse 10, Jesus was designated by God, it says, as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. So the point here is the priesthood of Christ was far superior to the priesthood of Aaron that the Jews revered and he's going to speak much more in depth on this in chapter 7. Now, here's what's happening: the implications of this are absolutely astounding to the believer because when you understand what is being said

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here, you understand more clearly who Christ is. This has to do with the eternal destiny of men's souls.

So he says, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain." Well, why is that? "It's because your ears have become dull of hearing." You see, for the borderline Christian who had an intellectual understanding of the Gospel but refused to go all the way and wholeheartedly commit themselves to the new covenant and for the Christian unbeliever who had merely made some superficial, perhaps emotional profession of faith but were no different than their borderline counterparts, all of this stuff is boring, irrelevant, unimportant, dull of hearing. I can hear them now, "What's all this ancient Melchizedek stuff? I mean, after all, who cares about any of that? I've got more important things to do in my life than understand some of these obscure doctrines out of the Old Testament. Yeah," someone else would respond, "I'm not sure about all this new covenant stuff and I'm already experiencing a lot of criticism and even hostility among some of my family members and friends." And another one says, "Yeah, I know, I mean, they're asking us to choose between our earthly priests and this new high priest, Jesus Christ, who they say is the head of the church. I'm not sure if I can go all the way with all of that. In fact," another person says, "yeah, you know, I'm afraid I'm going to be put out of the synagogue. Can you imagine if that happens to us? Then what are we going to do? You know, I think the cost of following Jesus may be just too high." That's the type of thing that's going on in their minds. And folks, this is what happens when Satan brings the full force of his worldly system against the fickle flesh of men because we are prone apart from Christ to prefer darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil. We want things our way, where we are comfortable. And frankly, Satan's lies appeal to our flesh like heroin appeals to a junkie and in order to support our habit, we have to become dull of hearing. "I don't want to hear that stuff." We only hear what we want to hear and have no concern whatsoever for anything else.

The term "dull" in the original language is a compound term that uses two words that we would translate: no, push, literally "no push." It's hard to move. It's a mind that is hard to move, a mentally lazy mind, slow to understand, indifferent. And it's interesting because it's in the perfect tense, the implication here is that they were once eager to hear but now they have fallen back into an apathetic condition. And he's going to go on to describe them in chapter 6, verse 4, when he says that they had once been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift. In other words, they were once interested, they will once open in the Gospel, but now they have retrogressed. That's the idea. They have moved backwards into an even worse state than they were before and they are no longer open to instruction. So, 1, we see the result of this, they become apathetic.

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Notice again, verse 11, "Concerning him," if I can paraphrase something, "Concerning him," meaning concerning the glorious truths of the regal office and priesthood of Melchizedek and how all of that pictured and is now perfectly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." These truths are going in one ear and out the other. Like an arrogant, unteachable teenager, your attitude is, "Whatever." Have you heard that before, parents? "Whatever. The high priesthood of Jesus Christ, too heavy, too advanced too difficult to understand, not interested, boring." F. F. Bruce described the situation perfectly. He said this, "Their sluggishness showed itself in a disposition to settle down at the point which they had reached since to go further would have meant to complete a severing of old ties, and to such people the exposition of the high priestly service of Christ with the corollary that the old order of priesthood and sacrifice had been abolished once for all, might well have been unacceptable." Then he says this, "The intellect is not over ready to entertain an idea that the heart finds unpalatable."

My friends, this is the mark of the unregenerate and think how this plays out in the church today. I see it all the time. Let me give you some examples. Most people find the doctrines of grace and salvation and God's sovereignty to be unpalatable. They don't want to hear it so they become dull of hearing. Try preaching on the doctrine of man's depravity and his total inability to contribute to his salvation, "Unpalatable." How about preaching on Christian purity and church discipline, "Unkind. Jesus is love." How about preaching a literal Genesis and a six day creation, "Unscientific. Don't want to hear that." How about marriage is only between a man and a woman, "Homophobic. Can't handle that." Well, how about let's preach what Jesus said that he is the only way to salvation, all other religions are false, "That's bigotry. How unloving to other people." You see, that's how it works. "I just don't want to hear it. It's too controversial. It's just unkind." In fact it is to a point today in evangelicalism that most pulpits avoid anything that is difficult, anything that is difficult to understand or controversial or offensive to the stubbornly apathetic people whose minds have become prejudiced to the truth. So much for preaching the whole counsel of God.

And as a result, dear friends, what we have in many cases are pusillanimous pastors that are sowing so many tares amongst the wheat that true believers are being choked out of their own churches today. Paul admonished frightened young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, he told him, "Timothy, preach the word. Even when it's not popular, preach it." And he goes on to say, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." The Greek is so fascinating here. The first phrase, "turn away their ears from the

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truth," is in the active voice, it means that they will deliberately hear the truth and say, "I don't like that. I want to go in a different direction." Consciously they will reject it. The second phrase is in the passive voice, it says, "and they will turn aside to myths," what that means is the myths will do the action, it will take you over, you won't even know it's happening. When you reject the truth consciously, you will get sucked into myths and won't even realize it. This is what was happening with some of those first century Hebrews, they had become dull of hearing.

Dear friends, please understand this: this is a mark of an unbeliever. When they hear the Gospel, an unbeliever is either going to reject it outright or they are going to embrace it superficially and then gradually tweak it and kind of reinvent it so that it accommodates their fleshly desires. But then there is a progression that begins to happen. They will become dull of hearing. And because of the hardness of their heart, they will get to a point where they can't comprehend truth. Try to give them deeper truths and they don't get it. Then when you try to build an edifice of Christian maturity upon a foundation that doesn't exist, then everything collapses in a heap of ruin and how many times have you seen that in people's lives? When you tell an unbeliever that God teaches this and he commands this and that, what do they say in essence? "Whatever. Too deep. Too controversial. Offensive. Not interested. Tell me what I want to hear. Give me a God that I can understand, a God that I can support, a God that I can appease, a God that I can manipulate. Give me a smiley face Jesus that will wink at sin. Give me a God that accommodates the changing morality of our culture. Give me a Gospel that is fun and inclusive and a kingdom that is easy to enter into. None of this striving to enter through a narrow door. None of this deny yourself and take up your cross daily to follow Christ. And by all means, give me a man-centered church that makes me feel good. I want a church that is all about me and my needs, not God and his glory. I want a country club religion." So the point is we see the same kind of pattern today in our culture.

First they were apathetic, they became dull of hearing, secondly, they were ignorant. Notice verse 12, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God." The principles here refer to that elementary principle, it was a Greek term that means "that which comes first." In other words, the most rudimentary elements of a particular subject. We might call it the ABCs and the ABCs here, the analogy, are the oracles of God which refers to the Old Testament. The oracles of God, the Old Testament where God revealed his character through the law, through the ceremonies, the sacrifices, the holy days, the rituals, the cleansings, the ordinances, even the furnishings, even the structure of the tabernacle and later on the temple.

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So the Jews understood this very well and this included all that foreshadowed and pictured God's plan of redemption and the coming Messiah. So what you have is the Old Testament and the old covenant which included the concepts of the priesthood of Melchizedek, all of that was, you might say, the ABCs of God's revelation to prepare them for Christ. You will recall what Paul said in Galatians 3:23 and following, he says, "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." You see, a tutor referred to, as you can imagine, someone who trained children, someone who taught their kids. The Old Testament was like a child's tutor to the Jews or like a picture book that we would give our children. You know those picture books they've got like the whole both pages are pictures and you've got maybe five words on one page and six on the other and that's the extent of it. So the Old Testament was what God used to begin to prepare the Jews. It was a picture to prepare their hearts for the Messiah, for the blessings of the new covenant that was about to come.

Now, the first century Hebrew unbelievers in these churches had heard the clear and compelling teachings concerning Christ in the new covenant. They had heard it to the point that by now they ought to be teachers. But we know as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," in other words, an unsaved man, "for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised." The term "appraised" carries the idea in the original language that they have no capacity to discern truth from error. They just can't see it even when it is presented to them. So they heard all of the basics but they never unreservedly embraced Christ in repentant brokenness and genuine faith. They never experienced, if you will, the miracle of the new birth, of regeneration. So the Spirit of God did not dwell within them and therefore all of this doctrine that was coming there, they didn't want that. They don't understand it. They don't want to hear it. They became dull of hearing, stubbornly apathetic, willfully ignorant.

They were so ignorant that they needed, he says, someone to teach them once again the elementary principles of the oracles of God. He says, "and you have come to need milk and not solid food." In other words, you have come to need, you have regressed back to the point where you need the very beginning level of Gospel instruction, not advanced instruction. By the way, it's interesting here if you look at this and you think about it, an infant never comes to need milk, does he? No, an infant craves milk from birth. You never have to try to get that infant to attach himself to mommy's breast, it just happens automatically. The only person who comes to need basic instruction is one who has regressed, gone back into a state of spiritual infancy. It's fascinating, Peter describes the

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natural insatiable appetite of the person who has truly been born again in 1 Peter 2:2, he says they are like newborn babes, they long for the pure milk of the word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. And of course, mommy's milk to a newborn baby, I've seen this with ours, you've seen it with yours, it's a matter of life and death. They've got to have it. Likewise, a new Christian or any Christian will crave the word. They will devour the word. They will grow into spiritual maturity because of the nourishment of the word. The word will become the priority of their life. But the unregenerate who merely tastes the truth a little bit, dabbles in it but never ingests it fully, they will never grow. They will never develop spiritually to a place where they want the solid food of more in-depth instruction. And I see this from time to time, those kinds of people crawl around the church like underdeveloped, retarded, whiny, demanding little babies and they will need someone to teach them once again the elementary principles of the oracles of God because they have come to need milk and not solid food. Solid food like, if I can put it this way, the filet mignon of the Melchizedekian priesthood that has such amazing implications in our life that pictures for us the universal, royal, righteous, peaceful, eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. Unbelievers are not concerned about that kind of stuff.

Verse 13, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness." The "word of righteousness," a reference to new covenant truths of the Gospel and all that is implied with that. Why? "For he is an infant." So think of it this way: borderline unbelievers and Christian believers who only possess an academic kind of intellectual understanding of Christ but they don't possess Christ himself, who just partake only of milk, they are not accustomed to, they are inexperienced, if you will, when it comes to the word of righteousness. They are like an infant when it comes to all of that.

Now, these people can gain some basic understanding, by looking at the picture book of the Old Testament they can see that, but unless they come to Christ in genuine saving faith, unless they are truly born again, they can no more digest as we see here, the word of righteousness than a toothless little infant can chew up and digest a steak. It's not going to happen. By the way, because of this we all need to say amen and celebrate the fact that we would be right there were it not for God's grace. I personally know men, I went to school with men who were brilliant Bible scholars, who knew the Scriptures so well academically, but they did not know Christ. They would choke on the Gospel. They just couldn't digest it and therefore their entire theological system was errant and powerless to save and to sanctify. They needed someone to teach them again the elementary principles of the oracles of God. They had come to need milk, not solid food, not the solid food of proper doctrine that adorns the Gospel of God.

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Verse 14, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Here we come to the third point: they were not only apathetic and ignorant, they were undiscerning. It's interesting, the author continues here to extend the metaphor of an immature infant to help them see their true state. And we've all watched little babies, we've got our little two-year-old granddaughter living with us now a lot, we take care of her during the day. We love it. We have a ball. But it's obvious that little children are ruled solely by their emotions, by their lusts, by their pleasures. Their senses, according to this text, are not trained to discern good and evil, right? We can all see that. They have zero discernment. They see nothing wrong with eating out of the dog bowl, right? I mean, they actually prefer the dog bowl over the pretty little Mickey Mouse bowl with all the colors that you spent eight dollars for at Walmart. The toilet bowl is as much fun as the bathtub, right? They have no discernment. They see no danger. They have no ability to restrain the demands of their flesh and their emotions. And we see how that works, they have no discernment for good and evil, for right or wrong. The rule is, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine." That's how it works. "If I want it, I get it. If you want it, I get it. If you have it, I want it." That's how it works. And share means, "I get whatever you have that I want." I mean, that's how they think, right?

Now, the good news is physically children begin to grow up. They naturally begin to develop discernment and, of course, physical pain is one of the things that God uses to help them understand things like, "It is not wise to touch the hot wood burning stove. It is not wise to grab the wasp. It is not wise to stand up on the bar of your bicycle and try to do this going down the road." They begin to learn that those things are not good but, folks, here's the point: an unbeliever who is spiritually dead in his sin, who is separated from the life of God, never grows up spiritually. They never develop any discernment ever. That person will drink out of a religious toilet bowl and tell you how wonderful it is. That kind of person will devour the dog food of false doctrine and will brag about how nourishing it is and how good it tastes. That person will make life decisions that will destroy their health, destroy their marriage, destroy their family, their career. But only a true believer craves the life-giving solid food of the word of God and will therefore, according to verse 14, practice which, by the way means "diligently apply, make it a habit," they will practice to train their senses to discern good and evil. And by the way, this is the great work of the Spirit of God in our lives. This is the process of sanctification, right? When we walk by the Spirit, we don't carry out the desires of the flesh. We learn how that works because the Spirit of God works with us. We discipline ourselves for the sake of godliness and so forth.

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# Discerning True Believers from False Part 1

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 5:11-14  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 15, 2017

So the author is telling these unbelieving Jews some, by the way of course who are also believing Christians, he's telling them this if I can summarize it this way, "Look, some of you folks have heard the truths of the Gospel of God, the unsearchable riches of Christ, you have heard it over and over but you refuse to pay close attention to it so you are drifting away from it. You're neglecting so great a salvation. And because of the deceitfulness of your sin, you are convicted that somehow you are right with God when in fact you are not and as a result your heart is becoming increasingly hardened to the truth of the Gospel that exposes your hypocrisy and your desperate need for repentance and saving grace. You have become dull of hearing. You have regressed to a state of apathy. You are indifferent about these saving transforming truths that God offers you in the new covenant. You have heard it so much by this time you ought to be able to teach it but instead you need someone to come again to you and teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God. Yes, you possess an academic, intellectual understanding of Christ but you don't possess Christ. You're so ignorant that you need someone to teach you the ABCs of the old covenant once again so you can grasp the infinite superiority of the new covenant to which it pointed. You're like a baby that needs milk because you can't handle solid food. And because of your profound spiritual immaturity, you have no discernment. You're unable to see the superiority of the new covenant over the old. You're unable to see who Christ really is. So in your infancy you keep hanging onto Judaism rather than growing up into full maturity by giving yourself completely to the new covenant, to your Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now for a few minutes in closing, I want to make some very practical applications that I hope you will find helpful. These characteristics paint such a clear picture of an unbeliever, maybe it's you or someone you know. And some will ask, "Well, can't we see similar characteristics in believers like Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 3?" Well, the answer is of course you can for a season but there is a big difference between 1 Corinthians 3 and what we have here. You remember in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul is dealing with believers, clearly believers, who enjoyed the milk and wanted the meat but he says they weren't able to receive it. In other words, literally the idea is they couldn't understand it to the point of application. They couldn't receive it. Why? Because of their immaturity, their fleshiness, their worldliness. Here in Hebrews 5, you have unbelievers who don't even want the milk, much less the meat. They are drifting away. They are neglecting so great a salvation. Their hearts are becoming increasingly hard. They are becoming dull of hearing. They are falling away from the truth as we are going to see more in chapter 6, falling back into Judaism. They were once eager to hear the Gospel but they had fallen back into an apathetic condition. This is not at all the case with the immature believers in 1 Corinthians 3.

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Let me read that passage to you, 1 Corinthians 3, beginning in verse 1, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men," you see, he's speaking to the brethren here, our fellow believers. "I could not speak to you as to spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ." "Men of flesh" means men that are controlled by the flesh more than the Spirit. In a word, they were worldly. They were carnal. He says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly," he says, "and are you not walking like mere men?" In other words, you're still acting like a brand-new little baby Christians. You tend to pursue your own self-interest, you are self-absorbed, self-centered. You want to be self-sufficient. You want to be independent of God. That's how babies think and act. So Paul couldn't give them the solid food. Not because they were just kind of young in their faith, which they were, but primarily because they were still men of flesh, they were still worldly. By the way, practically speaking, don't waste your time trying to teach deeper doctrines to a Christian whose character and conduct cannot be distinguished from the world. You're really wasting your time, even though they may want you to. Until you see the characteristics of a true believer as Jesus would describe in Matthew 5, one that knows what it is to mourn over their sin, when you see a person who has developed a gentle, a humble heart, who is filled with mercy and committed to purity, a person that is hungering and thirsting for righteousness, until you see that, they don't need to start grappling with some of the deeper doctrines of the word of God. But of course, those things are altogether different than the character of the unbeliever that's described here in Hebrews. Now, my challenge to you this morning, to whatever degree this applies to you, please deal with it. Please examine your heart. Be brutally honest. Don't allow your heart to deceive you. Come fully to Christ in humble repentant faith.

Now, some of you are married to people that I have just described, borderline believers or perhaps a Christian unbeliever. Maybe you have children that are like this. You've got friends, I've got friends, I've got family who are this way. I want to speak to you very directly. The temptation for most of us is to kind of look the other way. "Let's don't rock the boat." So we rationalize and we justify, we make excuses for them rather than to prayerfully and humbly and forthrightly tell them exactly what you see. I can't tell you how many times I have been to funerals where the deceased clearly had nothing in their life to validate their claim of genuine saving faith and some of them didn't even claim that. I knew the people and there was nothing about their life that demonstrated any love for Christ. They had no appetite for the word, no burden for the lost, no separation from the world, no love for other believers. They had no desire to worship and live for his glory. They were absolutely as I've described here, apathetic toward spiritual things. They lived only for themselves. They were willfully ignorant of the great truths of the word of

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God and his will. They had zero discernment in their life and yet everybody says, "Yeah, but he's in a better place now." No, he's not. He is in the solitary confinement of an eternal hell. And you didn't say anything to him?

You will remember in Matthew 7, Jesus made it clear that self-deception among the ranks of Christianity would be the rule, not the exception. He warned that many will enter through the broad gate of shallow profession without wholehearted commitment and that would lead to destruction, Matthew 7:13, in contrast to the few that would enter through the narrow gate of genuine repentance and wholehearted commitment that leads to life, verse 14. And he warned that many will stand guilty in the day of judgment, pleading their innocence based upon their own personal merit, based upon some phony profession of faith that sounded good and kind of looked good at the time but it wasn't real, pleading their own religious works rather than the righteousness of Christ. And at that time the Lord will say, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness."

Well, I know a lot of this is heavy because it's a burden for my heart for some of you but I want to close on a very encouraging note here, okay? Do you know what the really good news is? Jesus saves sinners like me and like you and if you're still breathing, today it's not too late for you. You know, even when we are truly born again, we're a mess, aren't we? I mean, we look at our lives at times and we think, "Oh my goodness." I'm just glad it's not a permanent thing that we love. If so, then we need to question if we truly know Christ. But so often I can read Romans 7 and see my name next to it where Paul said, "Oh, the things I don't want to do I do, the things I do want to do I'd don't. Wretched man that I am, who will free me from the body of this death! All of this sin, all of this, I hate it! I don't want to be that way!" And then what does he say? He says, "Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord! There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." Praise God for his saving and sanctifying grace because, folks, without it, we would have no hope and we would have no help.

So dear friend, wherever you are on this continuum of spiritual maturity, maybe you've not yet been born again, maybe you have but you're still just kind of a spiritual infant, maybe a toddler, maybe a teen, maybe you're even mature, I don't care where you are, we all have room to grow, don't we? We all have room to grow so let's examine our hearts, be brutally honest and get serious about who we are and who God is and go before the throne of grace and find that great help in our time of need and then just watch what God will do, okay? Watch what he will do. We serve a glorious God, don't we? Amen.

Let's pray.

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*Father, thank you for these eternal truths. May they bear much fruit in our heart and in our lives that we might enjoy the fullness of your grace, of what it means to be in fellowship with you. And Lord, for those that don't know you, Lord, make it clear to them and cause them to not just understand the Gospel, but to embrace it with all of their heart. Lord, only you can ultimately make that happen and I cry out to you to that end. We give you praise, we give you thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at [otcr.org](http://otcr.org).