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LIFE-STUDY OF HEBREWS, MESSAGE 29 THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE WORD OF THE BEGINNING OF CHRIST

My burden in this message is the basic principle of the word of righteousness. Hebrews 5:13 says that “everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.” Although many Christians understand the word of grace (Acts 14:3; 20:32), the word of life (Phil. 2:16), and even the good word of God (Heb. 6:5), not many know what the word of righteousness is. Why must the word be the word of righteousness? The writer mentioned the word of righteousness at a time when he was speaking of Christ as the High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec. Concerning Melchisedec he had “much to say” which was “hard to interpret” since the receivers of this epistle had “become dull of hearing” (5:11). They had been learners for quite a long time. In verses 12 and 13 the writer said of them, “For when because of the time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you what are the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and have become those who have need of milk and not of solid food.” Although they should have been teachers, at the time of the writing of this epistle, they still needed someone to teach them. They were still babes. Since “everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness” (Heb. 5:13), we see that the word of righteousness is for the mature, not for babes. Now in this message we need to see what the word of righteousness basically is.

If we would understand this matter of the word of righteousness, we must firstly be deeply impressed that the word of God is not mainly for knowledge. In this short portion of the Word (5:11-14), there seems to be a contradiction. Verse 12 uses the words “teachers” and “teach.” This surely refers to knowledge. However, in these verses it is clearly and definitely indicated that the word of God is for nourishment, for it likens His word to either milk or solid food. Milk and solid food are not for knowledge. People do not study them; they drink and eat of them as nourishment.

The Bible itself classifies God’s word into two categories— milk for babes and solid food for the mature (5:12-13). Paul told the Corinthians that because they were babes he could only feed them with milk (1 Cor. 3:1-2), and Peter, holding the same concept, said, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2). In Hebrews 5:12, milk refers to “the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God.” The Greek word translated “rudiments,” which also may be rendered as “primary elements,” denotes elementary things. For example, learning the twenty-six letters of the alphabet and the numbers from one to ten are the rudiments. If you were to talk with children in a philosophical way, they would be unable to understand. Recently, one of my grandchildren was pleased to show me how he could write the letters L E E. He was very happy with his elementary “candies.” In Christianity there are many old babes who can barely write the letters of the spiritual alphabet. If you were to talk with them about Matthew 25, they would say, “Oh, that is too difficult. As long as I have been redeemed and will go to heaven

when I die, that is enough for me.” They are content with “candy bars.” They can only take the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, not solid food.

The “rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God” in 5:12 are “the word of the beginning of the Christ” in 6:1. These are special terms found in the book of Hebrews. Even Christ, like your education, has a beginning. Some little children only know the ten numbers, being unable to do even the simplest addition. Likewise, in our spiritual education we have the word of the beginning of Christ. Many Christians can only say, “Christ died for me. I am a sinner and I should go to hell, but God loves me and sent Jesus to die on the cross for my sins. Now I believe in Him and I am saved.” This is the word of the beginning of Christ. How poor is the situation among most Christians today! They are even unable to discern the difference between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Whenever they see the word “spirit,” they take it to mean the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, regarding the Holy Spirit, they are unfamiliar with the term “life-giving Spirit.” Many of them do not even want to hear about it. It seems that when they read 1 Corinthians 15:45, which tells us that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit, they cover their eyes and pass it by. Have you not also passed by many verses in your reading of the Scriptures? I am quite sure that many of you have skipped over the first seventeen verses of the Gospel of Matthew. Perhaps you never paid attention to these verses before coming into the church life. Others might even have advised you to begin your reading of the New Testament with Matthew 1:18. Then you might have proceeded to read a little of chapter two regarding the visit of the wise men and chapter three concerning the baptism of Jesus. Perhaps you skipped chapters like thirteen, twenty-four, and twenty-five, finding them too difficult to comprehend, and gave some attention to chapter twenty-six. Maybe you shed a few tears for the crucified Jesus in chapter twenty-seven and then were happy to hear that He was resurrected in chapter twenty-eight. As you came to the end of Matthew, you thought of the Lord Jesus as ascending to the heavens, although Matthew does not speak of His ascension; yet, according to your traditional mentality, you added an extra point about Christ ascending to the heavens. This is the way many Christians understand the Bible today.

The word of the beginning of Christ is the good word of God (6:5). We all have tasted this good word. John 3:16 and Romans 6:23, both of which speak of eternal life, are examples of the good word. But even many Christians misinterpret these verses, taking eternal life to mean blessing and happiness in a heavenly merry land. What poverty in understanding the word of God! What a pitiful way of dealing with God’s holy oracle! This is the reason that in the Lord’s recovery we are burdened for the release of the richer, higher, and deeper word. In His mercy, the Lord is opening His word to us.

Please keep in mind that in this portion of the Word, milk refers to the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God and to the word of the beginning of Christ. May we all, especially the young people, become familiar with these terms and use them in our fellowship. We all need a new vocabulary. We should not stay in the region of old religious terminology, but cross the river into a new way of conversation and use the terms and phrases found in God’s pure word.

Solid food, which is for the mature, refers to the word of righteousness (5:14; 1 Cor. 3:2). The word of righteousness is more difficult to discriminate than the word of grace and the word of life. Righteousness always refers to God's government and governmental dealings. After considering the whole book of Hebrews, I have found that it is not only an unveiling of Christ on a higher level but also of God's divine government among His chosen people. For instance, 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Furthermore, 12:29 says that "our God is a consuming fire." In 10:30 we are told that the "Lord will judge His people." Verses like these can be found throughout the book of Hebrews. All five warnings in this book are based upon the fact that in Hebrews God is not the God of love but the God of righteousness, a consuming fire in His governmental dealings with His people. The book of Hebrews is not constructed with God's love; it is constructed basically with God's righteous government. It is a revelation of God's dispensational and governmental dealings with His people.

Consider the children of Israel. Although God loved them, delivered them from Egypt, and took care of them in the wilderness, their whole history is a picture of God's governmental dealings. In the wilderness God dealt with the Israelites in a governmental way. Because of this, not many of those who came out of Egypt during the time of the exodus entered into the good land of Canaan. Consider, for example, the way in which God dealt with Miriam, Moses' older sister, who had criticized him for marrying an Ethiopian woman (Num. 12:1-15). As a result of her criticism, she became leprous and was shut out of the camp for seven days. Moreover, due to God's governmental dealing, she was not allowed to enter into the good land but died in the wilderness (Num. 20:1). It was the same with Aaron (Num. 20:22-29). Even Moses touched God's government wrongly and was governmentally dealt with by Him (Num. 20:12). He earnestly desired and longed to enter into the good land, but God, according to His governmental dealing with him, did not allow him to enter in. Sympathizing with Moses, He did allow him to look upon the good land (Deut. 3:23-27; 4:21-22; 32:48-52). By these cases we see that it is a serious thing to touch God's government.

Christians do not understand the word of righteousness concerning God's governmental dealings. Such words are like hard bones, and many, unable to understand them, throw them away. But whether we understand these words or not, we are still under God's governmental dealings. In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy we see God's righteous governmental dealings. The word regarding God's governmental dealings is the word of righteousness, not the word of grace nor the word of life.

If you still do not understand what the word of righteousness is, read Hebrews 3 and 4 again. The word about not entering into God's rest is a word of righteousness, not a word of grace. In 3:15, a quotation from Psalm 95, we are told, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the provocation." Hebrews 4:11, another word of righteousness, says, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience." Keep in mind that the word of righteousness is deeper than the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, because it embodies the deeper thought of God's justice and righteousness in His dispensational and governmental dealings with His people.

Very few Christians today care for this kind of word. When we began to teach people about Matthew 25 more than forty years ago, telling them that the slothful servant would be cast into outer darkness, many rumors were spread about us. Some would not take the word of righteousness which unveils the truth that a saved person can be cast into outer darkness. Matthew 25 is not a word of

grace, nor a word of life; it is a word of righteousness. The same is true of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. In that portion of the Word we are told to take heed how we build in the church life. If we build according to the human, fleshly, and earthly way, we shall be building with wood, hay, and stubble. Everything built with these materials will be burned, and those who build with them will suffer loss. This does not mean that a saved person can be lost; it means that all he does may be burned and that "he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). This certainly is the word of righteousness. Few Christians care for such a word. They only want "candies," messages that comfort and soothe them. If anyone would stand up and declare to them that if they do not heed the Lord's word of righteousness they might be cast into outer darkness (Matt. 25:30) or be "saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15), they would not listen to him, but rather would oppose and condemn him as heretical. While most Christians only want "candies," in this Life-Study of Hebrews we are burdened to care for the solid food, the word of righteousness. We all must be careful about this, for someday the Lord will meet us.

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Hebrews 5:14 says that "solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their faculties exercised for discriminating between both good and evil." The Greek word translated "faculties" may also be rendered "senses," implying powers of perception, depending not only on our mental capability but also on our spiritual apprehension. These senses, implying both our mind and our spirit, discriminate the distinction between the different kinds of words of God. The words "good and evil" used here refer to what is superior in contrast to what is inferior, such as, the superiority of Christ in contrast to the inferiority of the angels, Moses, and Aaron; the superiority of the new covenant in contrast to the inferiority of the old covenant. According to the context of this verse, it is similar to the matter of discriminating between different foods, with no reference whatever to the moral nature of things. We need to discern, to discriminate, God's word as we do food, asking whether a particular word is like milk or solid food. In this way we can discern the word of righteousness.

The word of grace and the word of life, being the word of the beginning of Christ, are good. They are the foundation of our Christian life. Although the foundation is good, we should not lay it again and again. We would never do such a thing in building a meeting hall. The foundation requires the building up.

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Burdens for Church Prayers

- Pray for the young people to sanctify their time in the summer to pursue the Lord with their companions.
- Pray for the growth of the feeling of the Body of Christ.
- Pray for spreading to nearby cities
- For daily exercise in GOW training: prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth and attend Lord's day meeting on time.
- For gospel preaching on West Valley College campus, as well as for English-speaking testimony in Campbell.

Announcement

- Morning Revival: Speaking the Word of God week 5
- YP in summer pursue program: Luke chapter. 19.
- Prayer meeting 7:30PM on Tuesday (9/13) at meeting hall.
- 9/17 GOW 8:45am training at Santa Clara Meeting Hall, at last two hours we will be gospel preaching, and need to be excused if not able to come to training.
- 9/24 Video training of Psalms Crystallization Study, please register to the brothers, \$75 per seat.