



THE BEREA PAGE

"Examining . . . to see if these things are so" ~ Acts 17.11

Spinach Minds

"While many of us push our bodies to the limit, any unnecessary use of our minds is treated with the same disdain we gave, when children, to eating spinach or broccoli." ~ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 11

Settled Christians

"For those of us who have been Christians for a while, it becomes easy to think that we've pretty much exhausted the possibilities of the Christian life. We can settle into a routine of activities at church and in our small groups and Bible studies, with little expectation of anything new. The familiar becomes the predictable, and everything from here on will be more of the same. We dip our teaspoon into the vast ocean of the living God. Holding that teaspoon in our hand, we say, 'This is God.' We pour it out into our lives, and we say, 'This is the Christian experience.'" ~ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *When God Comes to Church: A Biblical Model for Revival Today* (Baker Books, 2000), 41

Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect." ~ Romans 12.2 NEB

To Know the Things of God Teaching the Churches

David Anguish

Though not the only factor in the early church's advance, we should not fail to notice the references to teaching in Acts. In the Jerusalem church, for example, the disciples' devotion to the apostles' teaching led their persecutors to complain, "you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (Acts 5.28; cf. 2.42; 4.2; 5.21, 25). After their release, we read that, "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus" (5.42).¹

We learn from the epistles that they continued to emphasize teaching in the churches they established. We'll briefly look at two examples.

First, consider Ephesians 4.11-16. Appearing immediately after Paul's appeal to maintain unity and before the ethical teaching in 4.17 - 6.18, verses 11-16 call for building up the body so that its members can reach unity in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. Church leaders, including teachers (*διδάσκαλος*, *didaskalos*), are to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (v. 12). What results if they do not equip is a church comprised of "children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes" (v. 14 NET). Conversely, successful equipping results in believers who are "speaking the truth in love," capable of "grow[ing] up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" and contributing to the growth of the body as a whole (vv. 15-16).

Next, consider Hebrews 5.11 - 6.3, part of the writer's self-described "word of exhortation" (13.22) which aimed to urge his readers not to "shrink back" from the better way of Christ lest they experience destruction and forfeiture of the benefits of Christ's "sacrifice for sins" (10.26, 38-39). Necessary to his

Honoring the Spirit

“But the true way to honour the Holy Spirit as our guide is to honour the Holy Scriptures through which He guides us. The fundamental guidance which God gives to shape our lives—the instilling, that is, of the basic convictions, attitudes, ideals, and value-judgments, in terms of which we are to live—is not a matter of inward promptings apart from the Word but of the pressure on our consciences of the portrayal of God’s character and will in the Word, which the Spirit enlightens us to understand and apply to ourselves.” ~ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1973), 214

Let God be God

“There are many who are ready to tell us confidently what would and would not be worthy of God; but in fact the only way to discover what is a worthy thing for God to do is to consider what God has actually done. The man who says, ‘I could not have a high opinion of a God who would (or would not) do this or that’, is not adding anything to our knowledge of God; he is simply telling us something about himself.” ~ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1964), 42

Prophets: Integrity

“These men [Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah] were not in the least concerned to make their message ‘acceptable.’ They were not out to placate the people in power or to conciliate the clever; their whole purpose was to speak ‘the word of the Lord.’ Such voices of integrity, despite all the obscurities and difficulties of the text, still sound like a trumpet down the centuries.” ~ J. B. Phillips, “Four Prophets,” *The Newborn Christian: 114 Readings* (Collier Books, 1978), 31

argument was an exposition on the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the old covenant’s Aaronic priesthood because Christ’s was “after the order of Melchizedek” (5.6; 7.1-17). But his effort to do this was frustrated because his readers were “dull² of hearing” (5.11).

They were sluggish because they had settled for a diet of milk instead of growing to be able to handle solid food (v. 12). That left them unable to “distinguish good from evil” (v. 14; talk about practical!). To remedy the problem, the writer called on them to make the effort necessary to grow in their understanding so they could navigate the challenges they faced. They would need to “leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity” (6.1). What constituted “elementary doctrine”? “Repentance from dead works, faith toward God, instruction about washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (vv. 1-2).

Consider three takeaways from these texts. First, Ephesians assumes that both the equipping leaders and the saints being equipped have responsibility in the growth process. Second, while Hebrews assumes that the elementary teachings are vital for salvation and growth, the writer is emphatic that they must be supplemented by other teachings that go deeper. Third, while assuming the importance of teachers for the disciples’ growth, the Hebrews writer did not absolve his readers from their responsibility to stretch, to reach up in order to access the deeper things they needed to know.

As N. T. Wright emphasized in the *Christian Chronicle* interview I referenced in [part 1](#), the appeal in these essays is not to learn for learning’s sake. Rather, it is to remember that, for the church to faithfully be the salt and light Jesus intends (Matt 5.13-16), we must, as a body, remain diligent to teach and know thoroughly what we are to live.³ At the least, we should show a commitment to learning that is comparable to what we expect for other important endeavors in our lives.

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Notes

¹ See also Acts 11.26; 13.12; 15.35; 17.19; 18.11; 28.31.

² νοθρός (*nōthros*), “lazy, sluggish.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 683.

³ For an example of the idea of comprehensive study with a practical application, see James Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Baker Academic, 2011).

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