

• *Spiritual dullness rebuked*

• *Called to a higher standard of godliness and maturity*

• *Called to live out the word of righteousness*

1. What he hopes for them.

• *Maturity*

• *Total commitment to living out the godly life*

• *Take in solid food*

2. What he wants to do

• *Move on from foundational teaching*

• *Not leave the basics but go beyond them*

We remember that the author of this letter to the Hebrews is rebuking the Hebrew Christians for their spiritual dullness. He is not blaming himself. He is blaming them! He is a good teacher – and he knows it. But they are spiritually dull and are not making good progress in Christian living. Admittedly they are having a tough time. We can sympathize with them! But the writer is calling them to higher standards of godliness and maturity. Are they ready for ‘strong meat’^{□1}? He proposes to move on in his teaching^{□2}. He has spoken of (i) his hope of teaching them more^{□3} and (ii) where they stand at the moment – they are spiritually dull^{□4}. Then the following verses speak of (iii) what he hopes for them^{□5}, and (iv) what he wants to do^{□6}. ¹³*For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is still a child. Baby Christians have not yet learned to live out the godly life – the ‘word of righteousness’ – in a practical manner by depending on Jesus our Melchizedek. Children – ordinary children – are not very skilful in handling the difficulties of life. They know little and have little experience. Spiritual childhood is the same. We enjoy the Christian life but (when we are immature) have not seen all that we need to see of the seriousness of living out ‘the word of righteousness’ skilfully. We enjoy the milk – the good news of the gospel with its historical facts and its assurance of salvation. But we are not so eager to be involved in the battles and conflicts of the Christian life.*

1. What he hopes for them. ¹⁴*But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.* He hopes that they will become mature and able to live on the solid food of God’s word. What is maturity? It is when one is totally committed to living out the godly life. It is not a matter of theological cleverness. The people who crucified Jesus could use a lot of theological arguments, but they were not even saved, much less were they mature. Maturity is a matter of love^{□1}, freedom from covetousness^{□2}, openness to God’s voice^{□3□4}, simplicity of talk^{□5}, steadfastness in trouble^{□6}, control of the tongue^{□7}, Christlikeness^{□8}. These things are the aim of Christian preachers^{□9}.

People who are pressing on to be like the Lord Jesus Christ need ‘solid food’. The kind of ‘solid food’ our writer has in mind is the kind of teaching he wants to give them about Melchizedek.

2. What he wants to do. He says: ¹*Therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary teachings about Christ let us go on to maturity. Let us not be laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith in God, ²instruction about washings and the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.* It seems that the Hebrew Christians were endlessly discussing the foundations of the gospel. ‘Is Jesus really the Son of God or is he only a great angel?’ they asked. ‘Do we need to publicly confess this salvation we have experienced or should we claim only to be Jews?’ But our writer says, ‘Let us get beyond that stage of Christian teaching!’ It is not that we leave the basics of salvation altogether! Christians will always need to build on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot progress beyond faith in him! But they

□1 5:11-14
 □2 6:1-2
 □3 5:11a
 □4 5:11b-12
 □5 5:13-14
 □6 6:1-2

□1 see Matthew 5:43-48
 □2 see Matthew 19:21
 □3 see 1 Corinthians 2:6
 □4 see Philippians 3:15
 □5 see 1 Corinthians 14:19-20
 □6 see James 1:4
 □7 see James 3:2
 □8 see Ephesians 4:13
 □9 see Colossians 1:28, 3:14

leave aside discussing whether Jesus' claims are true. They have an assurance about Jesus and they build their lives on him.

A six point summary in three pairs

(i) *The beginning of the Christian Life*

(ii) *What immediately follows coming to faith*

(iii) *The final outcome*

- *On a secure foundation – press on to perfection*
- *Discernment*
- *Living on Jesus our Melchizedek*

Our writer mentions a six-point summary of the basics of the gospel. They fall into three pairs. Early Christians received teaching about (i) the **beginning** of the Christian life (repentance, faith). They received training in (ii) **what immediately followed** their coming to faith (they needed to understand Christian baptism and how it related to other kinds of Jewish washings). If they had not received the Holy Spirit it seems that there was prayer and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. (It is the basis for 'confirmation' in some denominations where a bishop prays for a gift of the Spirit upon his people, a gift distinct from regeneration. New Testament Christians expected to be 'confirmed' in this way immediately after their coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.) Then, also, the Christians received teaching about (iii) the **outcome** of Christian faith: the resurrection which is to be the occasion when Christians fully inherit the rewards of godliness; and the eternal judgement which separates the righteous and the unrighteous for ever.

These are the foundations. The newborn Christian should know all about them. But they should not need debating. Instead we take these matters as sure and certain and we press on to 'perfection'. It is this that the writer wants for his people and it will involve living on the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we build up to higher levels of godliness and usefulness in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to have '*powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil*'. It means that we grow in godliness, we find our calling, we learn to recognize the attacks of Satan. We shall need the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ as our 'Melchizedek'. Perfection' – all-round maturity – is learning to live on Jesus and receive grace in time of need.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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