

- **\*READ Hebrews 5:11-14\*** The writer of Hebrews pens this great letter in hopes of helping the recipients to understand the superiority of Christ and their covenant relationship with Him. However in his efforts to teach, the inspired writer hits a bump in the road for as he writes in the text we just read together, *"it is hard to explain...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."* (**Hebrews 5:11,12**) The author desires to explain to the recipients the relationship between Christ and the priesthood of Melchizedek, but he can't because these disciples haven't been growing as they ought to have been growing.
- It seems very clear to me that there was an expectation of growth up to this point by the author of the letter to the Hebrews, and it is equally evident that he was sorely disappointed in their lack of growth. We might wonder the cause for their lack of growth, but thankfully the text provides us with the answer. In **Hebrews 5:11**, the inspired writer accuses these disciples of becoming *"dull of hearing"* according to the NASB. The New English Translation renders this as them becoming *"sluggish in hearing."* The Christian Standard Bible says that they had *"become too lazy to understand."* I don't know about you, but to me the message seems pretty clear! These people had lost interest in their spiritual growth. They had become complacent, and they were giving little to no effort in trying to grow in their knowledge of and faith in God.
- Simply put...their spiritual fire had been extinguished, and the only remedy was for a new fire to be lit underneath them. These disciples were in need of some zeal! If they wanted to grow and prevail then they needed to become zealous for growth. They needed to have a burning desire and passion for God and His will in their lives, and the exact same thing must be true for us if we, too, want to grow mightily and prevail in our faiths.
- This has been our focus over the course of this year, and as we enter into the second half of the year it can be extremely easy for us to overlook the task at hand and allow complacency to set in. So as a means of reminder of our goals for this year and maybe a bit of reinvigoration, I would like for us to consider this idea of being zealous or diligent for growth. Let's begin by considering that the troubles of these disciples are some of the same troubles that we face within our lives as disciples even if we are some 2,000 years removed from their days of living.

## I. **Complacency and apathy are real dangers that disciples face in their lives.**

### A. It was a problem even within the earliest days of the church.

1. We have already seen that as being the case here in **Hebrews 5:11-14**, but this is not the only place that we see such things. For example, consider Paul's words that were written to the church in Corinth that are found in **I Corinthians 3:1-3**. Here the Apostle states that he is not able to speak to these disciples as spiritual men, but instead he had to speak to them as *"men of the flesh, as to infants in Christ."* He had already taken time to share with them the milk of the word, and much like the Hebrew author, he wanted to share with them solid food, but they were still not able to receive such things. They should've been matured at this time, but instead they were still walking like mere men.

2. But maybe the most well known example of a church that was caught up in the doldrums of complacency and apathy is the church that is written to in **Revelation 3:14-19**...the church at Laodicea. Here Jesus, through the medium of John, writes to this church and strongly rebukes them for their apathetic faith. *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."* (**Revelation 3:15,16**) They had become fat and happy in their minds, and no longer did they burn in desire for God and His will. Jesus's remedy was simple, *"be zealous and repent."* (**Revelation 3:19**)

**B. These same tools of Satan continue to plague the people of God event today.**

1. Those same words of rebuke and encouragement might be extremely useful for some disciples even today because many of us have lives of relative easy that can be easily manipulated by Satan to cause us to become fat and happy and complacent in our faiths.
2. In this country, we are blessed beyond the wildest imaginations of so many disciples that have come before us. We are well compensated in our jobs, and this allows us nearly every need we might possibly have. We live in a time of relative peace where our government doesn't restrict our ability to assemble or teach. We have so many things going for us, and yet Satan wants to use these very things against us. He wants for us to feel so safe and happy right where we are in our faiths that we lose our burning passion for God because being a Christian just doesn't seem that painstaking at times.
3. Every week we come together, we study, we worship, we commemorate our Lord Jesus and His sacrifice, and then we go about our relatively peaceful lives where there are so many other things to focus on besides God...things that we enjoy a great amount and have become quite passionate about. I think we would all admit if we were being honest that it can be really easy to go into autopilot and lose our zeal for God. We can become so habitual in our lives as disciples that we lose the burning desire to please God and offer up heartfelt worship and sacrifice each and every day of our lives. This is what Satan wants so badly! He wants for disciples to become lukewarm, complacent, and apathetic. He wants for us to fool ourselves into thinking that coming to church during the week is enough to stimulate growth within our lives, and quite frankly....he's really good at doing this. Therefore we must stay on guard and fight against these dangerous temptations!

**II. These dangers must be fought by having a zeal (burning desire) for God and His will.**

**A. Time and time again we find inspired writers speaking to the importance and urgency of strongly pursuing a strong faith and its growth.**

1. In the letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul twice in **chapter 12** speaks to the necessity of zeal or diligence. *"he who leads, with diligence...not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."* (**Romans 12: 8,11**)
2. In **II Corinthians 7:6-11**, the Apostle Paul is rejoicing that his previous letter had led to the Corinthian being not just sorrowful but also penitent for their sins. He says that this sorrow and penitence had led to them coming to have a great zeal for Paul himself and the things of God.

3. Peter writes in **I Peter 3:13**, that zeal will carry the disciple through whatever difficulty life might present us with. Our burning passion for God will be what carries us through even the most difficult of situations because our desire to please God will be our great motivation.
  4. Then finally, we read in **Titus 2:11-14** that we were redeemed for the very purpose of being zealous workers in the kingdom of God.
- B. This same zeal spoken of by these inspired men must be present within our lives.**
1. Especially here in **Titus 2:11-14**, we find great motivation for our coming to possess this zeal, and that motivation is the fact that Jesus first had a great zeal for us. Jesus Himself passionately desired for our salvation even if it meant His own suffering and pain. We should be aware of Jesus being zealous for the things of God. (**John 2:17**)
  2. For it was through His sacrifice that He redeemed or purchased us. After purchasing us, He purified us through the blood that He shed on the cross. We then became His possessions, and as His possessions He desires to produce this same great zeal within us. He desires that we be a people that are passionately burning to do the will of God through the good deeds that He has desired that we do within this life.
  3. However, I believe it important for us to note that zeal isn't all that is required for us to be what God wants for us to be. If we look all around us in this life, we can see a great many people who seem to be very zealous for God within their lives, but that zeal hasn't lead them to a place where God is pleased because their zeal is not accompanied by proper knowledge. Their zeal hasn't lead them to know God or His will as they ought to, and this is a very serious problem that even the Apostle Paul recognized was something he struggled with early on in his life.
  4. Two times (**Acts 22:3 & Galatians 1:14**), the Apostle Paul confessed that he was a man who was very zealous for God during his life as a Jew. He was so jealous that it even led him to live a life where he persecuted Christians who followed Jesus as the Son of God. He was zealous for God, and yet He was far away from Him because He acted foolishly in his zeal. Paul recognized that this was the same situation that many of his fellow Jews found themselves. They had "a zeal for God, but not in accordance to knowledge." (**Romans 10:2**) Yes, we must give every effort to ignite a strong zeal for God within our hearts, but it must only lead us to do that which God desires, and one of His greatest desires is for our growth in our faiths.

### **III. That zeal will move us to seek growth within our faiths.**

- A. That growth will lead us to new heights and usefulness within the kingdom of God.**
1. This is exactly what Peter says will happen if we will be...you guessed it...diligent in our pursuit of growth within our lives. In **II Peter 1:5-11**, we read that our pursuit of growth within our faiths will allow for 1) us to be useful and fruitful. 2) us to make certain His calling and choosing of us. 3) us to never stumble. 4) our entrance into the eternal kingdom will be abundantly supplied. I don't know about you, but these things sound great!

2. Even more exciting is the fact that all of these things can be true about each of us! Each and everyone of us can be truly useful and fruitful within God's kingdom if we will be zealous in our work for the Lord. Each of us can have confidence in His calling of us if we are growing to be more like Jesus each day. Each of us can grow in maturity to the point that Satan goes in knowing that his temptations aren't going to do any good. Each of us can look forward in hope to our entrance into the eternal kingdom of heaven when this life is over. This can all be true because God says it is possible for it to be true about each of us individually.

#### B. But what does the zealous life look like?

1. How can we be sure that we are being as zealous for growth as we ought to be? While I can't find a specific checklist with quantifiable measurements within the Scriptures, what I can find is Paul telling Timothy in **I Timothy 4:15**, *"Take pains with these things, be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all."*
2. If ever there was a verse that could help us to understand what growth looks like then this is it. In this text, Paul tells us plainly that our growth can be and should be seen by others. Each of us should be growing to the degree that others can see that we have been putting effort into our faiths because we are zealous for the things of God. I myself have seen that within different people within this church. It has been very evident at times that people here have been doing their Daily Bible Reading, preparing for class, and thinking seriously upon the things of God. It shows up in our conversation, our demeanor, our attitudes, and our actions. Growth doesn't happen in the dark, but it should be seen and evident to all who know us the best. Even before others see our growth, that growth should be seen within ourselves.

So what about us? Are we people who have been zealous for growth? Have we moved on from the milk of the Word to those things that might allow us to even be teachers to others? If I haven't seen that growth in my life then it could very well be that I am not as zealous as I ought to be. If that is the case then I need to seriously think upon Jesus and His zeal for me and allow that zeal to fuel my own. May that zeal allow me to grow to where I am useful for God and His kingdom for certainly there is nothing better for me in this life than to have it said that I am useful for my God.

**\*PRAYER\*** *Our loving Father in heaven...we come before You at the close of this consideration of Your Word asking that You would light a fire deep within each of us. Light a fire that will move each of us to be people who are zealous for You and Your will within our lives. Help us to see the great importance of spiritual growth. Help us to see the zeal that Your Son had for us in giving His life. Help that to motivate us to give our lives fully to You as a pleasing sacrifice. May Your name be glorified in our lives as we live zealously for You each day, and may our growth and progress in our faiths be evident to all. May it be a source of encouragement by showing that Your grace is just as powerful today as it was in the beginning. Thank You so much for Your mercy, grace, and promises usefulness and fruitfulness, and we ask all of this in the name of Your Son Jesus the Christ...amen.*