

## Prayer

*(based on Psalm 130)*

O Lord, we cry to you from the depths of our hearts. We look for You, we wait for You, we place our hope in Your Word, and we watch for You, as for the morning. For in You is found steadfast love, the power to save, and the fulfilment of our hope! May all God's people, all those who bear the name of Christ Jesus, Hope in Him! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Waste

Each of us produces a considerable amount of waste, and we are mostly trapped into doing this by the nature of the goods we feel we need to buy. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you how you should deal with issues of waste, throwing away of food, recycling and associated issues. Ask the Lord to help you develop habits which reflect a Christian approach to waste.

## Meditation

By faith, Lord God, we know that in every weakness we have,  
There is a key, by which Your Spirit unlocks us into liberty.

In weakness, we are driven to depend upon Your strength;

In failure, we realise the power of Your faithfulness;

In sin, we cry out for the perfection of Your Spirit;

In loneliness, we seek the compassion of Christ;

In distress, we are touched by Your agony on the Cross;

In searching, we discover Your presence in the world;

And by faith, we follow the examples we have been given,  
In Christ and His Spirit. And by this faith, we are saved.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 5:11-14

<sup>11</sup> *There is much that we have to say to you about Jesus the High Priest which is hard to explain, but you have become lazy in hearing what is said to you.* <sup>12</sup>

*Although by this time you should be teachers, you need to have someone teach you again the first principles of the things of God. You need milk, not solid food; <sup>13</sup> and all who live on milk are de-skilled in understanding the teaching of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> On the other hand, solid food is for those who through regular use are disciplined in the skills of discernment, and are therefore able to distinguish between good and evil.*

## Review

Hebrews suddenly breaks off its description of Jesus as the Great High Priest, which we began to read about yesterday. The writer then speaks quite sharply about his belief that in general, what he was saying about Jesus' priesthood was beyond his readers. He breaks off the discussion of priesthood, returning to this later in chapter 7, and begins a substantial section of the letter dealing with weaknesses amongst the people of God and the dangers of falling away from the received Word of God (see mostly in chapter 6). In our passage today, we read a famous passage which makes a division between the 'milk' and the 'solid food' of teaching about the things of God. Unfortunately, the writer believes that too many believers still need the milk because they are not yet disciplined enough to be able to take on board the deeper truths of God's Word; the solid food!

It is probably true that many Christians today feel somewhat lost when they read parts of Hebrews, particularly chapter 5, and certainly, if Christians of the first century found it hard to follow, then it is not surprising that this will be true for some people now. We should not read these words casually however, but be prepared to read and take on board this tough

assessment by Hebrews about those people who have not progressed beyond consuming the milk of God's Word to the solid food. I have translated this passage carefully in order to tease out some of the important points within what the writer has to say.

The first thing we should observe is the writer's criticism of people's laziness in receiving Christian teaching; for this is the gist of verse 11. Hebrews does not imply that people do not understand the things of God because they have not become Christians properly, or they have not understood their baptism, or they have been misled by false teachers (a common problem with the early church, for example, see Paul's writing in Philippians). Rather, his accusation is that some who have become Christians do not think it worth their time to read, explore, listen, pray, and actively pursue their faith. He suggests that if his readers had done this, then his words of explanation about Christ's priesthood and other teaching in his letter would not be necessary, as the people of the church would know about it sufficiently well to be able to teach it themselves (5:14)! Unfortunately, speaking generally rather than any specific teaching, this is as true today as it was then. It is not the whole truth about the problems of God's people, but it is a significant one.

Nevertheless, we should not assume that Hebrews is dismissive of the 'milk'. The writer probably meant that milk was the primary understanding of salvation by Christ and God's work in the world, and it is likely that he meant the teaching about baptism which was given to all converts in the early church, and was far more rigorous than any similar teaching we give converts or young people today (records indicate that it could take up to a year for a baptismal candidate to be taught sufficiently about God to be considered for baptism). Hebrews strongly implies that if we do not move on from this, then we can become 'de-skilled'; stuck in an inadequate understanding of the depth and extent of 'righteousness'. This is the detailed teachings about how the work of Christ makes us 'right' with God, and its consequences (5:13).

Going on from this, the writer gives a brief hint at teaching he considers 'solid food'; and it is interesting that he describes the heart of this to be 'discernment'. The Greek words of verse 14 strongly emphasise the importance of putting what we have been taught into practice, and thereby learning to discern what the will of God is and what it is not. In other words, what is right and what is wrong, for God's will is by definition, 'right', or 'righteous'. Discernment is a little emphasised 'gift of the Spirit' (1 Cor 12:10) which derives from our understanding of 'Wisdom' in the Old Testament, and Hebrews rates it highly as a mark of maturity in the Christian, and the 'solid food' of the things of God. All in all, this is indeed a powerful challenge!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways do we become lazy in hearing, accepting and putting into practice what we are taught?
2. How can we ensure that we have properly consumed our 'milk', and then moved on to the 'solid food' of God's Word?
3. Discuss the importance of 'the discernment of spirits' (1 Cor. 12:10) as a spiritual gift in the life of the church today.

## Discipleship

This passage presents each of us with a tough challenge. We can assume that we have moved on from 'milk' to 'solid food', but it may well be worth the time if each of us took the trouble to re-visit the basic teaching we have received about our faith. I have a small booklet given to me when I confirmed my baptismal promises, which outlines the teachings of the church. It is called a 'catechism'; it is brief but covers almost every aspect of teaching about salvation and the church of God, and it can be quickly read. Unfortunately, it is not fashionable to use these today, but it is my way of checking myself out from time to time. Do you have something similar you could use?

## Final Prayer

When our understanding is dim and we fail to grasp what is happening to us, or the full consequences of our actions; good Lord, take control. Place us on a sure footing, direct our affairs with heavenly authority, and teach us how to learn from our troubles. Thank You, Jesus, our Saviour: AMEN