

godsend – learning for mission

Bible study resources

Unit 14. Grow disciples

Edited extract from Bob de Waay, “The danger of Perpetual Infancy.” Hebrews 5.11–14

To read the whole article, go to “The danger of perpetual infancy” in

<http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue15.htm>.

Babies are wonderful, so are baby Christians if you mean people who have recently come to faith. The author of Hebrews, however, is speaking of babes of a different variety.

These “babes” are in a state of perpetual infancy. They lack the willingness and ability to understand Biblical teaching of any complexity. So they lack discernment.

Spiritual babies love being entertained and amused like their counterparts in the nursery, but balk at learning and understanding theology.

Hebrews 5.11–14 puzzles many modern Christians because it is not compatible with their priorities. . . . Many remain babies today because they do not think growing up is worth the effort.

Hebrews 5.11 explains this condition. These Christians were “dull of hearing.” The Greek word means “slow and sluggish in mind.” The author’s readers had become confused and limited in their minds through apathy and mental listlessness. . . .

Many who fall into the category of “babe” in Hebrews 5 do not consider themselves such. Their lack of willingness to study and skill in doing so causes them to miss the point of this passage.

They think that a baby Christian is one who has not . . . given a prophecy in a meeting, . . . testified of performing miracles, or given substantial amounts of money. Rarely do they think in terms of lacking the ability to understand theology and the Bible.

The “oracles” to which the author of Hebrews refers are probably brief, easily understood sayings such as the Ten Commandments. . . . Babes never progress beyond briefly stated basics of the faith.

These elementary principles are necessary, as Hebrews 6.1–3 shows, but it is wrong to consider them all that is necessary for spiritual maturity.

The babe . . . understands only the most basic summary of the Christian message and has no hunger for more. Sometimes, slogans or formulae loosely based on Scripture serve as trite answers to every question, effectively cutting off serious theological discussion.

It is not that baby Christians never go to meetings where teaching is present. It is that they seek out teachings, teachers and churches that do not require them to think about theology. . . .

They prefer inspiring stories, pop psychology, motivational sayings, personal stories of spiritual experiences, “how to” seminars, or “touchy-feely” meetings of group encounter—anything but . . . Biblical teaching that requires the hearers to think and digest the material.

This more detailed Biblical study is expressly what Hebrews 5.11–14 urges as necessary for maturity and discernment.