

Fact Sheet for **“Unexpected Consequences”**  
**Hebrews 5:11-14**

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I find that with Hebrews it is good to constantly review what has been covered previously in the book.

1:1-14 Jesus, God the Son, is our creator, and is greater than both the prophets and the angels  
2:1-18 He is the author of our salvation  
3:1-6 He is greater than Moses, and therefore greater than the Mosaic Law.  
3:7-4:13 Rest from the works of that Law, and enjoy acceptance with God by grace through faith  
4:14-5:10 Jesus is both the king and our great high priest

And now we come to a passage about righteous living.

ESV 11 ¶ **About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

“About this” can more literally be translated “concerning which”. This would make verse 11 most naturally the concluding verse of the previous section describing Jesus as our great high priest.

**<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,**

What are “the basic principles of the oracles of God”? It wasn’t just head knowledge that the author of Hebrews was focusing on. He covers some pretty weighty stuff in this book that his readers were familiar with. Instead he is focusing on the application of what they knew about Jesus Christ and righteousness to their lives.

Now it is clear from the previous context that if they really understood salvation in Christ they would be confident in their faith. Instead they were in danger of slipping back into their old way of thinking. They had formerly been taught that obedience to the Law of Moses was how you found acceptance with God. The problem with that way of thinking was that no one is perfect! We all sin. And therefore no one gains acceptance with God by following the rules. Look at two verses from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:20, 48). Certainly by this time in their Christian experience they should have been confident in their faith and been able to teach others. But instead they had fearful doubts. But the author is introducing a different thought here.

**<sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.**

“Unskilled” might be better translated “inexperienced”. “It is not so much that a spiritual ‘infant’ lacks information – though at first he obviously does – but rather that he has not yet learned to put ‘the teaching about righteousness’ to effective use.”<sup>1</sup> This teaching about righteousness should lead to righteous living. This teaching is what the author referred to in the previous verse when he wrote “the basic principles of the oracles of God”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 793.

<sup>14</sup> **But solid food is for the mature** (τέλειος, adj.), **for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

### **Maturity**

This is one of three times the root word behind “maturity” is used in the immediate context, here and in 5:9 (“perfect”) and 6:1. Jesus truly followed the Father’s will, even to the cross. “Repentance from dead works” describes trying to be acceptable to God through works of the Mosaic Law. True maturity is found elsewhere.

### **Training**

“Trained” is translated from the word we which get “gymnasium”. This training involves constant practice, and leads to the ability to distinguish good from evil. (Here lies the reason I titled this sermon, “Unexpected Consequences”.) Jewish thought by the time of Christ was solidly behind the absolute necessity of ceremony and obedience to the rules.

### **The Mosaic Law**

Exodus 20:8-10 forbids work on the Sabbath, but what constitutes work? The Israeli Knesset passed a special Shabbat elevator law in 2001 ordering the planning and building of all residential buildings, and public buildings which have more than one elevator, to install a control mechanism for Shabbat in one of the elevators. On the Sabbath the doors operate automatically so that the observant Jew does not need to “work” by pushing the button. But is this what God intended in the Mosaic Law?

### **The Oral Law**

There was not only obedience to the Mosaic Law, there was also obedience to the oral law. Jesus constantly spoke about this (Mark 7:1-5). In that passage Jesus goes on to tell them that their oral law even voided the Mosaic Law.

### **The Problems with Rule Obeying**

1. You can never draft the rules tight enough.
2. Since we sin the tendency is to “fudge” the rules (see Luke 10:25-29).
3. Your attention is directed to the rule, not the principle behind it.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with several examples of the rules with these words: “You have heard that it was said... but I say to you that...” He goes on to give God’s much stricter commentary on those rules.

The Pharisees taught the rules of both the Mosaic Law and the Oral Law in an effort to teach people to be righteous before God. But the rules weren’t tight enough, people fudged, and were ultimately misdirected both in how to find acceptance with God and in how to truly live righteously. (These were the unexpected consequences of their incorrect teaching.)

### **The Right Approach**

First of all, we find acceptance with God by grace through faith. The author of Hebrews has made a clear point of this already. But we learn to live righteously now by knowing the Word of God (the word of righteousness), having the help of the Holy Spirit, and through constant practice in distinguishing good from evil. This is not “rule keeping”. It is maturity.

I always flinch when people are following the rules but have behavior that is not pleasing to God. I’m always pleased when I find someone living beyond the “rules” because their conscience would bother them otherwise. Be careful to press on to true maturity!