

Hebrews 05 - Jesus is a Superior High Priest; Warning #3: Failure to Progress Toward Maturity

I. Doctrinal Section of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 1:1—10:18)

(4) Christ is superior to Aaron (Heb 4:14—10:18)

(B) Christ fulfills the basic prerequisites of the Aaronic priesthood (5:1-9)

(a) Prerequisites (5:1-4)

(i) Man (5:1-3)

(ii) Called by God (5:4)

(b) Jesus fulfills the prerequisites

(i) Called by God (5:5-6)

(ii) Man (5:7-10)

(C) Believers are warned of the consequences of immaturity (Heb 5:11—6:20)

(a) The fact of immaturity (5:11-14)

Hebrews 5

(B) Christ fulfills the basic prerequisites of the Aaronic priesthood (5:1-9)

(a) Prerequisites (5:1-4)

(i) Man (5:1-3)

1 For every **high priest taken from among men** is **appointed on behalf of people in things pertaining to God**, in order to **offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins**;

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1 For every high priest selected from among men is appointed to officiate on their behalf in matters relating to God, that is, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

- The author points out four prerequisites for the priesthood:

- "...every" - emphasizes the principle is true for all orders of the priesthood

- "...high priest taken from among men" - first, to be a high priest in Israel, one had to be human. Since a priest represents man to God, he himself must be a man and a human being.

- No angel, as an angel, or God, as God, could function in this role. In order to be a High Priest, God had to become a man.
- The One we are interested in is indeed from men, but also far beyond that, as He is God who became a Man
- "...appointed on behalf of people in things pertaining to God" - not only is every high priest taken from among men, but he is "ordained" (appointed) for men
- Remember the distinction between prophet and priest (prophet represents God to man; priest represents man to God)
- The high priest appointee would be expected to stand between God and man as man's representative before God. The priest's services would include presenting "gifts" (of worship) and "sacrifices" (for sin).
- "for men" - Ex 28:1,3; 29:1 state that the high priest was appointed for God, but here the writer said that he was appointed "for men." Both statements are true.
- "...offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" - second, the priest must function in a priestly order; this is the causation, the reason that God created the priesthood. It was because of sin.
- "gifts" - refers to meal offerings used with sacrifices
- "sacrifices" - refers to blood offerings

2 he can **deal gently** with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is clothed in weakness;

2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;

2 He can deal gently with people who are ignorant and easily deceived, since he himself is subject to weakness.

2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

- Third, a high priest had to be compassionate and sympathetic, meaning he needed not only to carry out his duties acceptably, but he also needed to do so with the proper attitudes and feelings

— This is the advantage of his humanity: he has experienced infirmity, like with with the people he represents. This is the reason he can deal "gently."

- "...deal gently" - *metriopathein*, deal gently; to suffer without harshness, to treat others with kindness and moderation; it means to be in the middle of something, to bring balance. It is neither indifferent to moral lapses nor harsh.

— Jesus bears no selfishness, apathy, unrighteous anger or sin toward our weaknesses

— Although nothing is stated in the OT about moral qualities (such as compassion), the writer deduced this quality of gentle understanding from the basic fact that the high priest

is essentially a man among men

3 and because of it he is obligated to offer *sacrifices* for sins for himself, as well as for the people.

3 and because of it he is obligated to offer *sacrifices* for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

3 For that reason he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those of the people.

3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

-The disadvantage of a human priest on earth is the fact that he himself was sinful, and had to first offer sacrifices for his own sin

— On one hand he could be compassionate because he realized that he himself had weaknesses, but this brings in the problem of moral insufficiency

- The evidence of the sinfulness of Israel's high priests was the fact that they had to offer sacrifices for his own sins ("himself") as well as "for the people"

— Since Jesus was sinless, He did not need to offer sacrifices for His own sin (4:15; 7:27)

(ii) Called by God (5:4)

4 And no one takes the honor for himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, just as Aaron also was.

4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

4 No one takes this honor upon himself but he is called to it by God, just as Aaron was.

4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

- Fourth, the high priest had to be appointed by God because he had to represent man to God

— Aaron, the first high priest, was called of God to this office. He did not seek it nor did he merit it.

— He was appointed by God to act for his fellow man in offering sacrifices related to the removal of sin (Ex 16:33; 28:1; Num 17:8)

— The high priest appointees were primarily Aaron and his successors. This ceased to be true after the Babylonian Captivity, then the high priesthood became a political appointment.

- Anyone who tried to be a priest without God's appointment was rejected

— Korah led a rebellion against Aaron and was killed (Num 16:1-15)

— Saul attempted to take the role of priest and perform his own sacrifice (1 Sam 13:5-14)

— King Uzziah tried to burn incense, and was struck with leprosy (2 Chr 26:16-23)

(b) Jesus fulfills the prerequisites

In v5-10 the author shows that Jesus fulfilled the same four prerequisites, although not in the same order presented in v1-4.

(i) Called by God (5:5-6)

5 So too Christ did not glorify Himself *in* becoming a high priest, but *it was* He who said to Him, "**YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE FATHERED YOU**";

5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You";

5 In the same way, the Messiah did not take upon himself the glory of being a high priest. No, it was God who said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father."

5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

- "So too Christ" - compares the appointment of Jesus with the appointment of Aaron

- "...did not glorify Himself" - like Aaron, Jesus did not glorify Himself to become High Priest; God appointed Him to that office

- "...YOU ARE MY SON" - quoting from Ps 2:7 to show that Jesus' priesthood is related to His resurrection

— Only the Son of God could serve in the kind of priesthood that will be described later in this epistle

— God appointed Christ as King-Priest when He sat down at the right hand of God following His ascension (1:5)

- These two offices (King and Priest) are a primary argument in this epistle

— Ps 2:7-9 and Ps 110:1 predict the Messiah's reign as King; Ps 110:4 predicts His priesthood

— The same God who appointed Jesus as His "Son" also appointed Him as High Priest forever (6:20; 7:17,21,24,28)

6 just as He also says in another *passage*, "**YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.**"

6 just as He says also in another *passage*, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

6 As he also says in another place, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

6 As he saith also in another place, *Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

- This is a quote from Ps 110:4...

- "...MELCHIZEDEK" - the appeal to Melchizedek, the first priest mentioned in Scripture, validates Jesus' priesthood as different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood
- There was no succession of priests from Melchizedek, thus no "order." Jesus is a Priest of this kind, not like Aaron and his successors.
- Melchizedek is first mentioned in Gen 14:5-20

(ii) Man (5:7-10)

7 In the **days of His humanity**, He offered up both **prayers** and **pleas** with **loudcrying** and **tears** to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His devout behavior.

7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

7 As a mortal man, he offered up prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his devotion to God.

7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

- "...days of his humanity" - *sarx*, the weakness that characterized Jesus' life during His incarnation

- The second prerequisite Jesus fulfilled is that He is human, a Man

- The phrase covers the entire period from His birth to His resurrection (2:14; Cf. John 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16)

- "...prayers" - definite requests in general; includes expressions of need

- "...pleas" - a cry from one in need of protection, due to overwhelming calamity; an expression of urgency

- "...loud crying" - a loud, vocal outcry of someone who is disturbed; emphasizes intensity of suffering (i.e. Gethsemane)

- "...tears" - visible manifestations of grief; show intense emotional strain (Cf. Luke 22:44)

- Jesus addressed His strong emotional cries to Him who "was able to save Him from death," God the Father

- All of these things (prayers, supplications, strong crying, tears) show His humanity

8 Although He was a Son, **He learned obedience** from the things which He suffered.

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

8 Son though he was, he learned obedience through his sufferings

8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

- Jesus fulfilled the third prerequisite: He was compassionate, sympathetic

- He learned to be compassionate by learning obedience

- "...He learned obedience" - Jesus gained something through His sufferings...He gained experiential knowledge of what being a human involves
- He "learned" what obedience cost Him: suffering. Phil 2:8 makes the same point. He learned what obedience cost by means of the things He suffered.
- He "learned" obedience in the sense that He learned to obey His Father's will, as a human, "by the things which he suffered." For Jesus, God's will involved suffering (Phil 2:6-8).
- The obedience addressed here is not the obedience of works because salvation is never by works: this obedience is the obedience of faith (John 6:29; Acts 6:7; Rom 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:25-27; 2 Thess 1:8).

9 And having been **perfected**, He became the source of **eternal salvation** for all those who **obey** Him,

9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

- "...perfected" - the completion of a process or goal; the same root as the word Jesus used on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30)

— The Cross marked the end of His sufferings for sin, thus He could cry "It is finished"

— Because Jesus was perfected by means of His suffering, and the sufferings on the Cross brought Him to the goal He was aiming for, Jesus became the "author of eternal salvation" for all who obey Him

- "...eternal salvation" - in view of the writer's emphasis, it may be that this is also referring to the ultimate aspect of our salvation, our eternal inheritance

— We obtain this to the extent that we "obey" God, and obey Him through suffering as Jesus did (Mark 8:34-35)

— Likewise today, Christians face temptation to play down their commitment to Christ in the face of persecution of various kinds

— A major reason why early Jewish Christians suffered was because they chose to follow Christ

- "...obey" - trust (John 6:29; Acts 6:7; Rom 10:16; 1 Peter 1:22)

— He who "learned" to obey brought salvation to those who obey

Although from God's side His work is complete, from the human side He *became*. What He became was the result: the author of eternal salvation. He became the author of eternal

salvation because, by means of His sufferings and death, He was the final effectual sacrifice.

10 being **designated by God** as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

10 having been designated by God to be a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

- "...designated of God" - He was appointed a High Priest in order to help us in our obedience and sanctification

— This occurred after His death and resurrection, at His ascension

Having mentioned this unique order of priesthood, the order of Melchizedek, the author has much more to say about the topic but he is afraid that his readers, because of their spiritual immaturity, will not understand what he is talking about. Therefore, having mentioned that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, he drops the subject and he will pick it up again in 7:1. He now goes into his third digression.

Five Major Warnings

1. The Danger of Drifting (2:1-4)

2. The Danger of Disobedience (3:7—4:13)

3. The Danger of Stagnation: Failing to Progress Toward Maturity (5:11—6:20)

4. The Danger of Willful Sin (10:26-39)

5. Warning against Indifference (12:25-29)

All of the warning passages in Hebrews involve actions in relation to the Word of God.

(C) Believers are warned of the consequences of immaturity (Heb 5:11—6:20)

Warning #3: Stagnation (Failing to Progress Toward Maturity) (Heb 5:11—6:20)

It is commonly assumed that the community addressed in this passage, and in Hebrews as a whole, had failed to mature in faith and understanding, and consequently required rudimentary instruction rather than the advanced exposition of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice presented in 7:1–10:18.

The problem is that this assumption is not supported by the details of the text. The presentation of Christology from 1:1—5:10 presuppose advanced Christian instruction and a level of understanding that corresponds to solid food, not milk. In addition, the writer has no inclination to review the foundational elements of the Christian faith (6:1). He clearly regarded the hearers as mature. They have ingested instruction over a considerable

amount of time that qualified them to be teachers of others (v12). Consequently, the portrayal of them as infants who have to be nurtured with milk is not an accurate description of some or all of this community of readers.

However, the community has deviated from its earlier course (Cf. 10:32-34) by becoming sluggish in understanding (v12) and have regressed from spiritual adulthood toward infancy. This regression was an apparent attempt to sidestep their responsibility in a world that persecuted them and held them in contempt, but it threatened their integrity.

The purpose of 5:11—6:12 is to preserve the community by reminding them of what they have experienced and what they possess through the gospel. One must keep in mind that the emphasis in this section is on making spiritual progress in order to steer safely through misinterpretations of this important passage.

(a) The fact of immaturity (5:11-14)

11 Concerning **him** we have much to say, and *it is* difficult to explain, since you have become **poorlisteners**.

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

11 We have much to say about this, but it is difficult to explain because you have become too lazy to understand.

11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

- "...him" - Melchizedek, and more specifically, the Order (Priesthood) of Melchizedek (v10)

- The writer plainly states that his readers are in no condition to receive the subsequent teaching about the order of Melchizedek, which he feels obligated to give them. He calls them immature, backward, untaught, and dull of hearing.

— The author warns that maturity and the ability to handle the "meat" of the Word is expected of long-time professing believers (Cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3)

— The problem is that the doctrine of the Melchizedekian Order belongs to the category of meat, not milk. He is afraid that his readers, because of their stagnation and failure to progress in spiritual maturity, will not be able to understand what he wants to teach them.

— Rather than listening carefully, hearing completely and comprehending clearly, they had become mentally and spiritually dull in their hearing. They were not slow learners, but had allowed themselves to grow lazy; a spiritual callousness was growing over their ears.

- "...poor listeners" - *nothroi*, means "to have no push;" to be lazy or sluggish in hearing.

They were "ignorant" in the fact that they heard the truth, the truth was shared with them, but they chose to "ignore" it and not pay attention or take it into their heart, or put it into action.

- Note that they have *become* dull of hearing, implying that they were spiritually maturing at some point in the past
- Because the Melchizedekian doctrine is difficult to explain and understand, the author is afraid he will lose his readers because they will not understand it
- Ignoring truth for too long will wind up in you not receiving any more truth
- Deafness or dullness in reception is a dangerous condition for those who have been called to radical obedience
- The obligation of this verse is that every believer must develop a sensitive hearing of things which are hard of interpretation. Every believer must mature in order to handle the deeper topics of Biblical doctrine.
- Both “dull of hearing” in v11 and “sluggish” in 6:12 come from the root *nothroi*; these form an *inclusio* and sets this passage off as a distinct segment

All four of these verses (v11-14) are rich in content and each verse carries a specific obligation. The previous teaching he has just given in v1-10 brings with it specific obligations. Whenever new truth is revealed, all must submit to it. The revelation of truth is to produce fruit in the believer’s life as it is being perceived. There is always an ever-present danger of resting in previous attainments. What has happened to his readers is that they have reached a certain level and now they are resting on past attainments; they have failed to progress to spiritual maturity. In v11-14, he deals with the fact of stagnation and spells out specific spiritual problems these believers have.

12 For though **by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles** of the actual words of God, and you have come to need **milk** and not **solid food**.

12 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.

12 In fact, though by now you should be teachers, you still need someone to teach you the basic truths of God’s word. You have become people who need milk instead of solid food.

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

- “...by this time you ought to be teachers” - every believer becomes capable of instructing others when they have a mature grasp of the elementary truths of the faith (1 Peter 3:15; Cf. Rom 2:21)

— This is true whether or not that person has the gift of teaching (communicating with unusual clarity and effectiveness) or not. While not every believer has the gift of teaching,

every believer should be able to teach one-on-one to some degree.

— When we fail to pass on what we know, we begin to lose what we know; eventually we need to re-learn the most basic teachings of Scripture all over again. When we stop growing, we start shrinking.

- "...you have need again for someone to teach you" - he accuses them of regression; failing to advance in the spiritual maturity. They needed to be re-taught the ABCs of Scripture.

— The problem is that these topics belong to the category of strong food, not milk (to be developed further in Heb 7)

— They need to develop spiritually in order to show ability in teaching instead of being re-taught the same things over and over again (Cf. 1 Cor 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:1-2)

— These are not new believers. If they were new, baby believers, their inability to understand would be excusable.

- "...elementary principles" - these are listed in 6:1; many today think that these topics would be considered "strong meat"; if these topics are "milk," what does the author consider to be "strong meat"? (see Heb 7)

- "...milk" - the ABCs of Scripture; the basics of Jesus Christ and salvation

- "...solid food" - advanced doctrinal truth and its application in the issues of life

— The "meat" of the Word also refers to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven...the "Present Session" and eschatology. This will be further developed in Heb 7ff.

Those who fail to strive for righteousness fail to mature in their Christian walk. The immature cannot follow God through His Word. They rarely focus on, struggle with, or live out the ethical and moral consequences of faith. They are easily deceived. Therefore, people around them are not shown Christ through clear words or by holy lives.

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is **unacquainted with the word of righteousness**, for he is an infant.

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

13 For everyone who lives on milk is still a baby and does not yet know the difference between right and wrong.

13 For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

- "...unacquainted with the word of righteousness" - failure to make practical use of the knowledge they possess makes them "unskillful"

— If you're learning exciting things in Scripture, but you're not making use of that knowledge (applying what you learn), you are "unskillful"

- As long as a believer fails to apply what he learns, he remains a baby. The principle is “use it or lose it.”
- The best way to learn a biblical doctrine or a book of the Bible is to teach it
- You can only grow by eating stronger food. As long as a believer fails to go beyond the basics, he will remain a baby.
- Immature Christians take in only the basics of the gospel because they cannot receive and assimilate the more advanced aspects of the faith. They are unable to do this because they have not tried to understand and apply these more advanced truths.
- This is a picture of Christians who have been content to know and practice only the most elementary lessons of their faith, too lazy to do what is necessary to grow

These believers knew the Messiah was the final sacrifice and, yet, they thought there was nothing wrong with returning to sacrifices and symbols. Their problem was not a lack of knowledge, but a lack of exercising that knowledge in real-life situations. They needed to learn how to apply the Word to properly discern right from wrong. The obligation of v13 is they must use skill in applying the Word to resolve the major problems in biblical doctrine.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

14 But solid food is for mature people, whose minds are trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

- The mature believer has an unrestricted diet. They have attained the goal of their spiritual life because they applied what they knew and were open to learning more.

— Spiritual maturity is a result of careful exercise: those whose minds are “trained by practice” to decipher good from evil

— A mature believer has the ability to make responsible decisions

- Spiritual infants not only lack information, but also experience. Someone becomes a mature Christian by both gaining Scriptural insight, and using that to make decisions that are in harmony with God’s will.

— The “word of righteousness” (v13) is the “solid food” that results in righteous behavior. In this context, the “solid food” must refer to instruction about the high priestly office of Jesus.

This is a summary of the spiritual state of these believers. They have been believers for a long time; they have been taught sound doctrine in the past because by now they are to be teachers. However, they have not retained or used the truth they have been taught and need to relearn the first principles of the oracles of God. They have reverted from adulthood back to infancy in spiritual things. They have lapsed from maturity to immaturity and from "meat" to milk. Although the spiritual adult and the spiritual babe both have the Word of God, only one knows how to use the Word. Usage of the Word causes believers to progress from immaturity to maturity; a lack of usage means regressing from maturity to immaturity.

Four Marks of Spiritual Immaturity

1. Laziness (dullness) toward the Word (v11)
2. Inability to teach the Word to others (v12)
3. A diet of only elementary truths in the Word (v12-13)
4. A lack of skill in applying the Word (v14)