

**Hebrews 5**  
**March 13, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What is one food or drink that you take in every day without fail? If you don't have that beverage or food, the day doesn't feel right...[Coffee? Semi-Sweet Chocolate? Some form of sugar?]

Q: What do you do to make sure you always have access to your daily food or beverage? [Buy in bulk? Buy more goods when food is about to run out?]

Q: If you did run out, would you make a special run to go get it? [Absolutely!]

I love two cups of coffee every morning. It's the first thing I drink. Breakfast isn't appealing until I have had my coffee. I rarely run out of coffee because I always buy an extra pound of coffee so that I see two bags of coffee in my fridge at all times. It would be real easy to hear this as an addiction problem, but the truth is that these two cups of coffee is the only caffeine I have all day. I love coffee because it's refreshing. It is the right amount of stimulant to wake me up to embrace a new day.

Don't you think that God would be delighted if we had the same fervor toward studying His Word as we do pursuing our favorite food or beverage? Just as we enjoy eating our favorite food, I bet God would love to see us feed on the Word of God daily. However, there are still too many Christians who don't read their Bibles. For example:

- The Barna Group found in 2014 that only 37% of Americans who own a Bible read it once a week. (<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/664-the-state-of-the-bible-6-trends-for-2014#.VuN9ItP2apo>)
- The Religion News Service found in 2013 that only 26% of Americans read their Bible four times a week or more (<http://www.religionnews.com/2013/04/04/poll-americans-love-the-bible-but-dont-read-it-much/>)
- LifeWay Research surveyed more than 2,900 Protestant churchgoers in 2012 and found that while 90 percent "desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do," only 19 percent personally read the Bible every day. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2012/september/80-of-churchgoers-dont-read-bible-daily-lifeway-survey.html>)

Q: Why do you think so many people struggle to read their Bibles?

- "I see the problem as analogous to obesity in America. We have an awful lot of people who realize they're overweight, but they don't follow a diet," Birdsall said. "People realize the Bible has values that would help us in our spiritual health, but they just don't read it." (Doug Birdsall, President of American Bible Society)

- “The Bible can come across as intimidating to the uninitiated. “There’s a tendency to think that if you read the Bible, you have to read it from start to finish. But when people do read the Bible, they don’t know where to begin.” (Rev James Martin, Jesuit Priest)
- “The Bible is pushed to the side in part because people are just too busy. Among those who say their Bible reading decreased in the last year, the number-one reason was busyness: 40% report being too busy with life’s responsibilities (job, family, etc.).” (The Barna Group)

Q: What is your personal experience with reading the Bible? Do any of you resonate with these findings? [Let people chime in]

**Transition:** I hope today’s study inspires all of us to more reading of Scripture. The writer is going to express his perception of where the Hebrew Christians are regarding their spiritual maturity, and it is directly correlated to their level of knowledge in God’s Word. We have an opportunity to encourage one another. To spur one another to delve into God’s Word more.

I also don’t want you to be thrown off by the first part of this chapter. The writer is going to finish his thoughts on the superiority of Christ as a priest, but he ends the chapter with frustration. He would love to go deeper with them on the topic of priests, but can’t because of their lack of spiritual growth. I think **all of us can mature spiritually by finding ways to continually feed on the Word of God.**

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.1:

- Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

V.2:

- He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.

V.3:

- This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

V.4:

- No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.

V.5:

- So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”

V.6:

- And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

V.7:

- During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

V.8:

- Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

V.9:

- and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him
- V.10:
- and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- V.11:
- We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.
- V.12:
- In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!
- V.13:
- Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted ("inexperienced") with the teaching about righteousness.
- V.14:
- But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

The writer describes this process of becoming a priest and the qualities expected to be found in a priest:

Q V.4: Who chooses the priest? [God – you cannot self-appoint or be chosen by man. We have a couple of biblical examples of those who tried: Korah and his fellow rebels tried to make themselves priests, and God judged them (Num. 16). When King Uzziah tried to enter the temple and burn incense, God afflicted him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21).]

Q V.1: Where does the priest come from? [From among men to minister for the people]

Q V.1: What was the priest's main task? [Represent men in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins]

Q V.2: What quality should be found in a priest? [He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.]

Q V.3: What level of awareness does a priest have about their own sinfulness? [High – this is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people.]

Let's now compare priests like Aaron and compare them to Christ who became the great high priest in verses 5-10:

Observation on V.5: The quotation in Hebrews 5:5 is from Psalm 2:7. This psalm was already quoted in Hebrews 1:5 to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But the emphasis in Hebrews 5:5 is on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, not on His deity.

Q V.5: So it raises the question as to what significance does this quotation have for the writer's argument?

[The answer to that question is in Acts 13:33–34, where the Apostle Paul quoted Psalm 2:7 and explained what it means. The phrase, “Today have I begotten Thee,” does not refer to the birth of Christ at Bethlehem, but to *His resurrection from the dead*. The Son of God was “begotten” into a glorious new life in His resurrection! He ascended to heaven in a glorified body to become our High Priest at the throne of grace. When Aaron was ordained to the priesthood, he offered the sacrifices of animals. But Jesus Christ, to become our High Priest, offered the sacrifice of Himself—and then arose from the dead!

But God the Father not only said, “Thou art My Son” in Psalm 2:7; He also said, “Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:6, quoted from Ps. 110:4). This psalm was also quoted earlier in Hebrews (1:13) to affirm Jesus Christ’s final victory over all His enemies. When Aaron was ordained, God did not speak directly to him and declare his priesthood. But the Father did make this special declaration concerning His Son.]

Q V.6: Who chose Christ to be the high priest? [God did]

Q V.6: Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, which tribe had the role of priest? [Levites]

Q V.6: Does anyone want to take a guess at which tribe Jesus came from? [Judah]

Q V.6: There are two factors that the writer points out that make Christ’s priesthood unique and, therefore, His ordination greater. What are they?

[First, He is a High Priest *forever*. No Old Testament priest ministered forever because each priest died and relinquished the office to his successor. The word “forever” is an important one in this epistle. At least six times the writer affirms that Christ’s high priesthood is forever (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28). And, since He is a Priest forever, He gives His people salvation forever (Heb. 7:23–28).

The second factor that makes Christ’s ordination unique is that He belongs to *a different order* from the Old Testament priests. They belonged to the order of Aaron; He belongs to the order of Melchizedek. This is a key concept in Hebrews, but since chapter 7 is all about Melchizedek, we will take time to examine and understand it at that time.]

Q V.7: The writer gives his readers a poignant picture of Christ. Where do you think Jesus is when he “offers up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him?” [He is in the Garden of Gethsemane prayer, our Lord did not oppose the Father, but prayed, “Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). **He was not praying to be spared from death, but to be saved out of death. He was praying for resurrection from the dead, and God answered that prayer.** He had prophesied His own death and had made it clear that He was laying down His life of His own free will. This ties in with the quotation from Psalm 2:7, cited in Hebrews 5:5, that promised His resurrection from the dead.

Observation: The writer of Hebrews states that Jesus’ prayer “was heard” (Heb. 5:7), that is, answered by the Father. Since He *did* die on the cross, this could not have been what He was praying about; for if the Father had answered, the Son would not have been crucified. He did not

pray to be saved *from* death, but *out of death*; and God answered His prayer by raising Him from the dead.

Q V.8: How did Jesus “learn obedience?” [In the same way any son must learn obedience: by the experiences of life. We must remember that our Lord, in His earthly walk, lived by faith in the Father’s will. As God, He needed to learn nothing. But as the Son of God come in human flesh, He had to experience that which His people would experience, so that He might be able to minister as their High Priest. **He did not need to learn *how* to obey because it would be impossible for God to be disobedient. Rather, as the God-Man in human flesh, He had to learn what was involved in obedience. In this way, He identified with us.**]

Q V.9: Here is such a central part of the gospel message. When Christ died on the cross for our sins, what did He become? [The source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.]

Transition: So the author goes to great lengths to explain the superiority of Christ as our great high priest, but this is where he runs into disappointment. As we review these last four verses, I think you can easily find the CONSEQUENCES of not spending time in the Word of God, but when we finish processing it, I want us to evaluate our own commitment to reading God’s Word and see if we can help and encourage one another to make reading Scripture just as enjoyable as drinking a hot cup of coffee!

#### **Find the marks of spiritual immaturity:**

- (V.11) ***Dullness toward the Word.*** The word translated “dull” or “slow to learn” in Hebrews 5:11 is translated “slothful” in Hebrews 6:12. It refers to a condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development. One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull.
- (V.12a) ***Inability to share.*** The ability to share spiritual truth with others is a mark of maturity. Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but all can share what they learn from the Word. The recipients of this letter had been saved long enough to be able to share God’s truth with others. But, instead of helping others to grow, these Hebrew Christians were in need of learning *again* the simple teachings of the Christian life. They were experiencing a second childhood!
- (V.12b-13) ***A “baby food” diet.*** Milk is predigested food, and it is especially suited to babies. But only those who have teeth can enjoy meat. The writer defines the “milk” as “the elementary truths of God” (Heb. 5:12). The “meat” of the Word is the teaching about our Lord’s ministry *now* in heaven as our High Priest. The writer wanted to give this “meat” to them, but they were not ready for it. **The “milk” of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ did on earth—His birth, life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection. The “meat” of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven.** We begin the Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth. We grow in the Christian life on the basis of His unfinished work in heaven.
- (V.14) ***Unskillful in using the Word.*** As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our “spiritual senses” and develop spiritual discernment. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will

put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures.

Observation: Notice that mature believers eat “solid food” and by **constant use** *have trained themselves* to discern good and evil is a vital part of Christian maturity. The nation of Israel in Moses’ day lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance. The readers of this letter were in danger of making the same mistake.

**LOOK:**

All of us want to grow toward spiritual maturity. How can we be just as excited about feeding on the Word of God as we do having our daily coffee, or hot tea, or whatever?! How can we encourage each other to be in the Word every day? What inputs would you like to gather from our class before we are dismissed? How can we help each other overcome barriers?

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 291–295). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**Jesus Christ Has a Superior Ordination (Heb. 5:1, 4–6)**

When I became pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, Kentucky, it was necessary for me to go to the city hall and be bonded. Otherwise, I would not have the authority to perform marriages. I had to show my ordination certificate and prove that I was indeed ministering at the church.

One day I received a frantic phone call from one of our members. Some Christian friends were being married the next day by a relative from Michigan, and they discovered that he was not authorized to perform the ceremony! Could I help them? The visiting pastor could read the ceremony as well as I could, and he knew the couple better than I did; but he lacked the authority to minister.

No man could appoint himself as a priest, let alone as *high* priest. King Saul invaded the priesthood and lost his kingdom (1 Sam. 13). Korah and his fellow rebels tried to make themselves priests, and God judged them (Num. 16). When King Uzziah tried to enter the temple and burn incense, God smote him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21).

Aaron was chosen by God to be the high priest, and he was duly ordained and installed in office (Ex. 28). He was chosen *from* men to minister *for* men. His main task was at the altar: to offer the sacrifices God had appointed (see Heb. 8:3–4; 9:14). Unless the sacrifices were offered in the right place, by the right person, they were not accepted by God.

The very existence of a priesthood and a system of sacrifices gave evidence that man is estranged from God. It was an act of grace on God's part that He instituted the whole levitical system. Today, that system is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is both the sacrifice and the High Priest who ministers to God's people on the basis of His once-for-all offering on the cross.

The subject of ordination stated in Hebrews 5:1 is further developed in Hebrews 5:5–6. Jesus Christ did not appoint Himself as High Priest. He was appointed by God the Father. The quotation in Hebrews 5:5 is from Psalm 2:7. This psalm was already quoted in Hebrews 1:5 to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But the emphasis in Hebrews 5:5 is on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, not on His deity. What significance, then, does this quotation have for the argument?

The answer to that question is in Acts 13:33–34, where the Apostle Paul quoted Psalm 2:7 and explained what it means. The phrase, "Today have I begotten Thee," does not refer to the birth of Christ at Bethlehem, but to *His resurrection from the dead*. The Son of God was "begotten" into a glorious new life in His resurrection! He ascended to heaven in a glorified body to become our High Priest at the throne of grace. When Aaron was ordained to the priesthood, he offered the sacrifices of animals. But Jesus Christ, to become our High Priest, offered the sacrifice of Himself—and then arose from the dead!

But God the Father not only said, "Thou art My Son" in Psalm 2:7; He also said, "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6, quoted from Ps. 110:4). This psalm was also quoted earlier in Hebrews (1:13) to affirm Jesus Christ's final victory over all His enemies. When Aaron was ordained, God did not speak directly to him and declare his priesthood. But the Father did make this special declaration concerning His Son.

Two factors make Christ's priesthood unique and, therefore, His ordination greater. First, He is a High Priest *forever*. No Old Testament priest ministered forever because each priest died and relinquished the office to his successor. The word "forever" is an important one in this epistle. At least six times the writer affirms that Christ's high priesthood is forever (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28). And, since He is a Priest forever, He gives His people salvation forever (Heb. 7:23–28).

The second factor that makes Christ's ordination unique is that He belongs to *a different order* from the Old Testament priests. They belonged to the order of Aaron; He belongs to the order of Melchizedek. This is a key concept in Hebrews, so we must take time to examine and understand it.

Melchizedek is mentioned in only two places in the entire Old Testament—Genesis 14:17–24 and Psalm 110:4. His name means "King of Righteousness," and he was also "King of Salem [peace]." But the fascinating thing about Melchizedek is that he was *both a priest and a king!* King Uzziah wanted to be both a priest and a king, and God judged him. Only in Jesus Christ and in pre-Law Melchizedek were these two offices combined. Jesus Christ is a High Priest *on a throne!*

The reason Jesus Christ can be "a Priest forever" is that He belongs to the "order of Melchizedek." As far as the Old Testament record is concerned, Melchizedek did not die (see Heb. 7:1–3). Of course, because he was a real man, he did die at some time; but the record is not given to us. So Melchizedek becomes a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who is a *Priest* forever.

But Melchizedek also pictures our Lord as a *heavenly* High Priest. Jesus Christ could never have served as a priest when He was on earth because He did not belong to the tribe of Levi. Jesus was born of the seed of David, the tribe of Judah. He became the sacrifice on earth that He might become the High Priest in heaven. All of these truths will be developed in Hebrews 7–10, but they are introduced here.

### **Jesus Christ Reveals a Superior Sympathy (Heb. 5:2, 7–8)**

Every Old Testament high priest had to minister to people who were "ignorant, and ... out of the way [wayward]" (Heb. 5:2). God made no provision but judgment for high-handed sins of rebellion (see Ex. 21:12–14; Num. 15:27–31). But He did make provision when people sinned through ignorance or weakness. An Old Testament priest could identify with the sinners, since he himself was a sinner. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest had to offer a sacrifice *for himself* before he could offer one for the nation! (Lev. 16; Heb. 9:7)

You would think that one sinner would have compassion for another sinner, but this is not always the case. Sin makes a person selfish. Sin can blind us to the hurts of others. Sin can harden our hearts and make us judgmental instead of sympathetic. Remember how heartbroken Hannah, who was praying for a son, was accused by high priest Eli of being drunk? (1 Sam. 1:9–18) And when King David was confronted with a story of a rich man's sin, he had no sympathy for him, even though David himself was a worse sinner (2 Sam. 12).

No, it is the spiritually minded person with a clean heart who sympathizes with a sinner and seeks to help him (see Gal. 6:1). Because we are so sinful, we have a hard time helping other sinners; but because Jesus is perfect, He is able to meet our needs after we sin.

Our Lord was prepared for His high priestly ministry during His days of ministry on earth (Heb. 5:7–8). The phrase, "In the days of His flesh," means, "In the days when He was on earth in a human body." From birth to death, our Lord experienced the sinless infirmities of human nature. He knew what it was to grow and mature (Luke 2:52). He experienced hunger and thirst,



as well as weariness (John 4:6–8, 31). He also faced temptations to sin (Matt. 4:1–11) and persecutions from the hands of sinful men.

How could the Son of God “learn obedience”? In the same way any son must learn obedience: by the experiences of life. We must remember that our Lord, in His earthly walk, lived by faith in the Father’s will. As God, He needed to learn nothing. But as the Son of God come in human flesh, He had to experience that which His people would experience, so that He might be able to minister as their High Priest. He did not need to learn *how* to obey because it would be impossible for God to be disobedient. Rather, as the God-Man in human flesh, He had to learn what was involved in obedience. In this way, He identified with us.

This preparation involved the experience of death. The writer of Hebrews (5:7) focuses on our Lord’s experience in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46). As He faced the Cross, it was not the physical suffering that burdened Jesus, but the fact that He would be made sin and separated from His Father. Other servants of God have faced death and not expressed such great emotion; but no other servant ever bore on his body the sins of the whole world.

In His Gethsemane prayer, our Lord did not oppose the Father, but prayed, “Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). He was not praying to be spared *from* death, but to be saved *out of death*. He was praying for resurrection from the dead, and God answered that prayer. He had prophesied His own death and had made it clear that He was laying down His life of His own free will. This ties in with the quotation from Psalm 2:7, cited in Hebrews 5:5, that promised His resurrection from the dead.

The writer of Hebrews states that Jesus’ prayer “was heard” (Heb. 5:7), that is, answered by the Father. Since He *did* die on the cross, this could not have been what He was praying about; for if the Father had answered, the Son would not have been crucified. He did not pray to be saved *from* death, but *out of death*; and God answered His prayer by raising Him from the dead.

No one else ever died the kind of death that Jesus died. He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Men have died because of their own sins, but only Jesus died for the sins of a whole world. He experienced the ultimate in suffering and, therefore, He is able to sympathize with His people when they are suffering. The readers of this epistle were going through difficult times, but they had “not yet resisted unto blood” (Heb. 12:4). Their goods had been seized and they had been ridiculed (Heb. 10:32–34), but they had not been crucified and forsaken by the Father.

No matter what trials we meet, Jesus Christ is able to understand our needs and help us. We need never doubt His ability to sympathize and strengthen. It is also worth noting that sometimes God puts *us* through difficulties that we might better understand the needs of others, and become able to encourage them (see 2 Cor. 1:8ff).

When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a young preacher in London, his successful ministry aroused the envy of some of the clergy; and they attacked him with various kinds of slander and gossip. His sermons were called “trashy,” and he was called “an actor” and “a pulpit buffoon.” Even after his ministry was established, Spurgeon was lied about in the press (including the *religious* press); and this was bound to discourage him.

After one particularly scurrilous report in the press, Spurgeon fell before the Lord and prayed, “O Lord Jesus, Thou didst make Thyself of no reputation for me. I willingly lay my reputation down for Thy sake.” From that time on, Spurgeon had peace in his heart. He knew that his Great High Priest understood his need and would give him the grace that he needed for each hour.

## **Jesus Christ Offered a Superior Sacrifice (Heb. 5:3, 9–10)**

This topic has already been touched on, and the writer of Hebrews discusses it in detail in Hebrews 9–10. Two important matters are involved.

The first is that Jesus Christ did not need to offer any sacrifices for Himself. On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest first had to sacrifice for himself; and then he could offer the sacrifices for his nation (Lev. 16). Since Jesus is the sinless Son of God, there was no need for Him to sacrifice for Himself. He was in perfect fellowship with the Father and needed no cleansing.

The second matter is that our Lord's sacrifice was once and for all, whereas the Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated. Furthermore, those sacrifices could only *cover* sins; they could never *cleanse* sins. It required the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God for sin to be cleansed and removed.

Because He is the sinless, eternal Son of God, and because He offered a perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ is the "Author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). No Old Testament priest could offer *eternal* salvation to anyone, but that is exactly what we have in Jesus Christ. The phrase "being made perfect" does not suggest that Jesus was imperfect! The word means "made complete"; we described it in our study of Hebrews 2:10. By means of His earthly sufferings, Jesus Christ was equipped for His heavenly ministry as our High Priest. He is able to save, keep, and strengthen His people.

Does the phrase "them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9) suggest that, if we do not obey Him, we may lose that eternal salvation? To "obey God" is the same as "to trust God," as "them that obey Him" is a description of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). "But they have not all obeyed the Gospel" (Rom. 10:16). "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Once we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, and thus obeyed His call, we experience His eternal salvation.

It is difficult to resist the four arguments presented in this section. We must conclude with the writer that Jesus Christ the great High Priest is superior to Aaron. It would be foolish for anyone to return to the inferiorities of the old Law when he could enjoy the superiorities of Jesus Christ. Then why were these Hebrew believers tempted to go back into legalism? *Because they were not going on to maturity in Christ!* For this reason the writer paused to exhort them to grow up in the Lord; and that is the theme for our next chapter.

## **PILGRIMS SHOULD MAKE PROGRESS**

### *Hebrews 5:11–6:20*

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (Heb. 6:12, NIV).

This verse summarizes the main message of this difficult (and often misunderstood) section of the epistle. Israel wanted to go back to Egypt; and, as a result, a whole generation failed to inherit what God had promised. They were safely delivered out of Egypt, but they never enjoyed the promised rest in Canaan. We believers today can make the same mistake.

If you keep in mind that the emphasis in this section is on *making spiritual progress*, you will steer safely through misinterpretations that could create problems. In this section, the writer deals with three topics that relate to spiritual progress.

## The Marks of Spiritual Immaturity (Heb. 5:11–14)

The writer is about to begin his explanation of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, but he is not sure his readers are ready for what he has to teach. The problem is not that he is a dull teacher, but that they are dull hearers! The word translated “dull” in Hebrews 5:11 is translated “slothful” in Hebrews 6:12. It refers to a condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development.

What, then, are the marks of spiritual immaturity?

***Dullness toward the Word (v. 11).*** These believers started on their “backward journey” by *drifting from the Word* (Heb. 2:1–4), and then *doubting the Word* (Heb. 3:7–4:13). As a result, they were now “dull of hearing”; that is, unable to listen to the Word, receive it, and act on it. They did not have the attitude of the Thessalonians: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13).

One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself.

***Inability to share (v. 12a).*** The ability to share spiritual truth with others is a mark of maturity. Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but all can share what they learn from the Word. One of the hardest lessons children must learn is the lesson of sharing. The recipients of this letter had been saved long enough to be able to share God’s truth with others. But, instead of helping others to grow, these Hebrew Christians were in need of learning *again* the simple teachings of the Christian life. They were experiencing a second childhood!

***A “baby food” diet (vv. 12b–13).*** Milk is predigested food, and it is specially suited to babies. But only those who have teeth can enjoy meat. The writer defines the “milk” as “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12). The “meat” of the Word is the teaching about our Lord’s ministry *now* in heaven as our High Priest. The writer wanted to give this “meat” to them, but they were not ready for it.

The “milk” of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ did on earth—His birth, life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection. The “meat” of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven. We begin the Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth. We grow in the Christian life on the basis of His unfinished work in heaven.

Of course, even the maturest adult never outgrows milk. As believers, we can still learn much from our Lord’s work on earth. *But we must not stop there!* We must make spiritual progress, and we can do this only if we learn about Christ’s priestly ministry for us in heaven. (See Heb. 13:20–21 for a summary of what the Lord wants to do for His people now.)

***Unskillful in using the Word (v. 14).*** As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our “spiritual senses” and develop spiritual discernment. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures.

Just as our physical bodies have senses without which we could not function, so our inner “spiritual man” has “spiritual senses.” For example: “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear” (Matt. 13:16). As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner “spiritual senses” get their

exercise and become strong and keen. Paul called this process exercising ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7–8).

The ability to discern good and evil is a vital part of Christian maturity. The nation of Israel in Moses' day lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance. The readers of this letter were in danger of making the same mistake. It is impossible to stand still in the Christian life: we either go forward and claim God's blessing, or we go backward and wander about aimlessly.

I once heard a preacher say, "Most Christians are 'betweeners.' "

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"They are between Egypt and Canaan—out of the place of danger, but not yet into the place of rest and rich inheritance," he replied. "They are between Good Friday and Easter Sunday—saved by the blood but not yet enjoying newness of resurrection life."

Are *you* a "betweenener"?

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 790-793). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### *A. Introduction: the qualified Priest (5:1–10)*

Before enlarging on the ramifications of the priesthood of Christ, the writer took the logical step of showing Christ's qualifications for that role. Though His priesthood has already been assumed, its validity must now be asserted if the admonitions based on it are to carry full weight.

#### 1. THE GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR A HIGH PRIEST (5:1–4)

5:1. If it be asked what a **high priest** really is, the answer is easily drawn from the Old Testament institution with which the readers were familiar. Such a person is one of mankind's own number: he **is selected from among men** and he is also their representative **in matters related to God**. These "matters" include the offering of both **gifts (*dōra*) and sacrifices (*thysias*) for sins** (cf. 8:3; 9:9).

5:2–3. The high priest must also be a man of compassion as the word *metriopathein*, which underlies the phrase **deal gently**, implies. This is the capacity to moderate one's feelings to avoid the extremes of cold indifference and uncontrolled sadness. For an ordinary high priest of the Old Testament, this sympathy grew out of an awareness that **he himself was subject to weakness**, prone to failures of his own. Hence in his sacrificial activities he must make the necessary offerings **for his own** and the peoples' **sins**. In this respect alone, as the author will show later (cf. 7:27), Christ did not exactly correspond to the characteristics described here, since He "was without sin" (4:15). But it is also possible that the writer thought of the compassion of the Son-Priest as being far richer than the moderate gentleness he ascribed to other high priests.

5:4. But one thing is certain. The high-priestly office was a divine appointment and could not simply be entered because one aspired to that **honor. Just as Aaron was**, this High Priest must also be **called by God**.

#### 2. THE SON'S CALL TO PRIESTHOOD (5:5–10)

5:5–6. No one is to suppose, the author insisted, that Christ began His priestly functions without the appropriate call from **God**. On the contrary, the same One who declared **Christ** to be the King-Son, declared Him also to be **a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek**. In uniting as the author did here the text of Psalm 2:7, which he had quoted before (Heb. 1:5), and the text of Psalm 110:4, he skillfully joined the two great truths about the Messiah which lie at the heart of this epistle. The declaration of Psalm 2 had proclaimed Him the Davidic Heir whose destiny was to rule the nations (cf. Ps. 2:8). But Psalm 110 had also been earlier quoted to much the same effect (cf. Heb. 1:13). Now, however, a further statement of this latter psalm was cited to show that the future Conqueror is also a Priest of a special order. In this way the author united in the person of Christ the dual offices of Priest and King. In doing so the author was perhaps conscious of countering a sectarian position like that evidently current at Qumran, where both a lay, or kingly, Messiah and a priestly Messiah seem to have been anticipated. In any case the two quotations given here from Psalms 2:7 and 110:4 furnish the concentrated essence of the author's thought about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is likely enough that the writer assigned the proclamations of both psalms to the moment when the Son "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb. 1:3).

5:7. But also in other respects Jesus is qualified for His priesthood. If it is a question of offerings (cf. v. 1), it can be pointed out that when Jesus was on earth **He offered up prayers and petitions**. In the expression "offered up" the writer employed the same verb (*prospheō*) he had used in verse 1. The added description, **with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death**, has often been thought to refer to the experience of Gethsemane. But the Greek here seems to reflect the Septuagint rendering of Psalm 22:24. Since that psalm is messianic for this author (cf. Heb. 2:12), it is probable that he actually has the sufferings of the Cross in mind, as does the psalm. This would be appropriate since the cries of the Savior would then be linked directly with His sacrificial work.

That these "cries and tears" were accepted by God is evidenced by the observation, **He was heard because of His reverent submission** (*eulabeias*). To this also Psalm 22 bears reference in that its latter half are the words of One who has emerged from suffering in triumph and praises God for that (cf. Ps. 22:22–31). In fact the psalm's first note of triumph has already been quoted (i.e., Ps. 22:22 in Heb. 2:12). Thus the "reverent" Sufferer was indeed saved from death, and this by means of rising from the dead. Hence too the Resurrection furnishes the decisive proof of God's acceptance of **Jesus'** sacrificial activity.

5:8–10. The whole experience just referred to was a form of education for Jesus before He served His suffering people. His unique relation to God notwithstanding (**He was a Son**), He had to experience the true meaning of obedience in terms of the suffering it entailed. Having done so, He was thereby **made perfect** for the role He would play as His people's Captain and High Priest. That there is an element of mystery in all this need not be denied, but it is no greater than that found in Luke's words: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). In a real sense not fully comprehensible, the Incarnation gave the already infinitely wise and perfect Son of God the experiential acquisition of knowledge about the human condition. Suffering thus became a reality that He tasted and from it He can sympathize deeply with His followers. (The Gr. has an interesting play on words in the verbs **He learned** [*emathēn*] and **He suffered** [*epathēn*].)

This is what the writer had in mind when he affirmed that **He became the Source** (*aitios*) **of eternal salvation for all who obey Him**. The salvation here referred to cannot be distinguished from that which is termed an inheritance (Heb. 1:14). It is also to be identified with the "eternal

inheritance” mentioned in 9:15. It should not be confused with the acquisition of eternal life which is conditioned not on obedience but on faith (cf. John 3:16, etc.). Once again the writer had in mind final deliverance from and victory over all enemies and the consequent enjoyment of the “glory” of the many sons and daughters. This kind of salvation is explicitly contingent on obedience and indeed on an obedience modeled after that of Jesus who also **suffered**. It is thus closely related to the saying of the Lord in which He declared, “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:34–35).

The High Priest has become the “Source” of this kind of salvation experience for those who are willing to live obediently. In describing Him this way, the author was chiefly thinking of all the resources that flow from Christ’s priestly activities that make a Christian’s life of obedience possible. Whatever one’s suffering, the High Priest understands it, sympathizes, and makes available the “mercy” and “grace” which are needed to endure it successfully. As the writer will later say, “He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25). With precisely this end in view Christ **was designated by God to be High Priest in the order of Melchizedek**.

### *B. The third warning (5:11–6:20)*

The author had barely begun his consideration of the topic of the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. But he felt constrained to pause for another warning section before proceeding further. This was due to the immaturity and sluggishness of his audience which made him wonder how much exposition they could digest. No doubt he hoped to arouse them to greater attentiveness to the truth he wished to unfold. But at the same time he wanted them to face squarely the danger of remaining where they were, since this could lead to tragic retrogression.

#### 1. THE PROBLEM OF IMMATURITY (5:11–14)

5:11–12. **We have much to say about this**, he began, referring to the subject of Jesus’ Melchizedek priesthood. As it turned out, his subsequent discussion was indeed lengthy (7:1–10:18) as well as deep. Accordingly he anticipated that it would be **hard to explain because** his readers were **slow to learn**. They had been Christians a long time, he reminded them, so that **by this time they ought to be teachers**. Others who had been in the faith less time than they should be profiting from their instruction. Instead they needed someone to instruct them again in the basics.

In alluding to **the elementary truths** the writer employed an expression which could refer to the letters of the alphabet as they might be learned by a school child. “You seem to need your ABCs reviewed,” his rebuke suggested, but at the same time he had no intention of going over them (6:1). What he apparently had mainly in view was their wavering state of mind in regard to the error that sought to lure them away from the faith. If they were being urged, whether by sectarians or others, to abandon their Christian profession, then clearly this called into question the fundamental truths they should have been firm in. The result was, to all appearances, **you need milk, not solid food!** But what he would shortly offer them would be solid food indeed, by which he evidently hoped to pull them dramatically forward in their Christian experience.

5:13–14. It is unsatisfactory to remain a baby in spiritual matters. This is true because a spiritual **infant, living on milk ... is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness**. The words “not acquainted” (*apeiros*) might be better rendered “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. He lacks the skill which goes with maturity and which results in the ability to make appropriate moral choices. Such ability is exactly what is possessed by those **who ... have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil**. That kind of person can handle **solid food**.

Once more the writer betrayed his concern about his readers’ ability to reject the false ideas which confronted them. Had they been sufficiently mature they would be able to “distinguish” those ideas as “evil” over against the truths they should have known were “good.” But he feared that this capability was not yet really theirs, though he would make every effort to instill it in them.