

Hebrews 5:1-14: Are You Still a Baby Christian...After All These Years?!

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I. Introduction

The Lord's desire is for all of us to experience and be matured by His salvation, i.e., as we apply what He taught us to life's difficulties, the Lord will perfect us and thus enable us to become a source of eternal salvation to others as Jesus was to us. Therefore, if we've been a Christian for a year or more, we should be showing others how to live and succeed in the Christian way of life.

II. Hebrews 5:1-14: You're Supposed to Apply What God Taught You, Then Show Others How To

5:1-6, having begun to address the third pillar of Judaism (the Levitical priesthood) at the end of chapter 4, the author elaborates on this point. He goes on to list the requirements for a high priest and how Jesus not only met every one of them, but was superior in each one compared to the Aaronic priesthood.

First, every high priest must be human; he must be "taken from among men." This means that an angel can't be high priest. Not even God can be high priest, unless He becomes human, which is what Jesus did. Jesus, who was, is, and ever will be God (1:3, 8-12), became flesh (John 1:14) in order to become our High Priest. *Second*, a high priest must represent mankind to God in a priestly order; he is "appointed for men in things pertaining to God." He is the bridge between God and man. *Third*, he must offer "both gifts and sacrifices for sins." When man fails, the high priest brings his atoning sacrifice to God; he brings the sinner's blood offering to God in order to repair the relationship between him and God (9:22). *Fourth*, he must be gentle and compassionate with the lost sinners he represents. He can be gentle because "he himself is also subject to weakness," i.e., as a fellow human being, he knows what it's like to suffer in the human condition. But there was a flaw in the Levitical priesthood: the high priest was able to identify and thus be gentle with the sinners he represented because he himself was a sinner! So when he brought God the sinner's sacrifice, he had to first offer God a blood sacrifice for his own sin. However, Jesus never had to because He never sinned (4:15). *Fifth*, a high priest must be appointed by God, "just as Aaron was." Aaron was appointed by God as the first high priest of Israel (Exodus 28:1). And whoever tried to take this honor to himself was severely disciplined by God, including death (Numbers 16—Korah; 1 Samuel 13:5-14—king Saul; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21—king Uzziah).

The author now begins to show how Jesus fulfilled all these requirements, starting with the last one: *First, God appointed Jesus as High Priest*; Jesus did not appoint Himself and the author proves it by quoting Psalm 2:7 again (he cited it at 1:5) and Psalm 110:4. Both of these are Messianic psalms about Jesus; they both state that God has appointed (and will guarantee) Jesus as the Messianic King who will rule over the nations from David's throne. God declared this at Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:33; Romans 1:3-4). However, Hebrews 5 is talking about Jesus as High Priest not King. What does this mean? It means that at Jesus' resurrection, God not only appointed Him King over the nations; He appointed Him High Priest, BUT after the order of Melchizedek not Aaron. Why Melchizedek? Because Jesus is God's priest and king as was Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20). Jesus' appointment as High Priest required a new priesthood. Under the Levitical priesthood, priests came from the tribe of Levi (kings came from Judah, Genesis 49:10). Since Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and was the Messianic King, He could not be High Priest under the Levitical order. A new priestly order was required.

5:7-10, second, Jesus was also human, (“in the days of His flesh”). Third, Jesus was gentle and compassionate with lost sinners (e.g., John 8:1-11) because of His tremendous suffering, especially at the end of His life and especially in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-39; Luke 22:39-44—these accounts don’t mention loud crying and tears, but the author of Hebrews does). Before Jesus’ arrest, He was in deep agony and He cried out to His Father, the One able to save Him from death (Psalm 22:1-21a). And His Father heard Him (Psalm 22:21b-31) because of Jesus’ godly fear, i.e., Jesus, though the Son of God and equal with God, did exactly as His Father asked Him to do (Philippians 2:5-8). The author also says that Jesus “learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” This doesn’t mean that Jesus was ever disobedient. It means that through Jesus’ suffering, He learned firsthand what it meant to be God the Father’s Son, to love the way the Father loved humanity. So fourth, Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice for sin, Himself on the Cross and thereby learned the cost of love and obedience. And having been perfected through the suffering He went through (Philippians 2:9-11), Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Thus, fifth, Jesus functions as King and Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” representing mankind to God in this new priestly order.

When the author says that Jesus is the “author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,” he doesn’t mean that we have to work for our eternal salvation, that somehow salvation is by works instead of faith: Scripture is crystal clear, it’s by faith not works, Ephesians 2:8-9. He means what he’s meant from the beginning of the letter. It’s God’s desire to bring all of us to glory, to see all of us perfected like His Son was through our suffering (2:10). Jesus is thus, a merciful and faithful High Priest, the source of our eternal salvation in the sense that He wants to help us overcome our sufferings (2:16-18; 4:14-16) so that we could be perfected through them the way He was (5:7-9).

5:11-14, the author would like to go on and discuss the deeper meaning of Jesus’ priesthood according to Melchizedek, but there’s a problem: his audience won’t understand because they have become “dull of hearing.” They didn’t used to be, but now they are sluggish and lazy about the things of God. They have been taught the Word of God so long that they should be teachers by now, but instead, they need to be taught the ABCs of God all over again. Instead of being able to eat the meat of the Word, they need milk. Those who go to church every Sunday, but never actually apply God’s Word to their lives, are grown men and women who need diapers and baby formula once again. They never grew past babyhood because spiritually they never actually learned to crawl, then walk, then run. Those who mature to Christian adulthood are those who actually put into practice God’s Word. Their spiritual muscles are “exercised to discern both good and evil.” That is, because they walk daily with God and meditate on what He said and then put it into practice they know exactly what to do about life’s difficult problems like bullying, teen sex, love and intimacy, things like depression, addiction, anxiety, or a bad boss, or career choice, etc., etc.

When was the last time you showed someone how to live the Christian life? How long have you been a Christian? One, two years? Longer? If you’ve been a Christian for a year or more, then you’re supposed to be teaching others the way of your faith. Jesus is not calling you to be preachers, but He is calling you to show others the Christian way of life (Matthew 28:19-20).

III. Conclusion

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.