

The Book Of Hebrews

Part II

Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18)

Lesson 5 (5:11-6:20)

Outline thus far.

- I. God's Final Word Spoken Through His Son (1:1-2:18).
- II. The Need For The Incarnation Explained (2:5-18).
- III. Exhortation To "Hold Fast" And Warning Against Unbelief (3:1-4:13).
- Part II - Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18).

- I. Jesus Qualified For Priesthood (4:14-5:10).
 - A. Jesus' Priesthood - an Encouragement to Faithfulness (4:14-16).
 - B. Christ a High Priest by Divine Appointment (5:1-11).

II. Digression - Warning Against Apostasy and Encouragement to Faithfulness (5:11-6:20)

A. Spiritual immaturity of readers rebuked (5:12-14)

Immaturity described (12).

Two points made. **Firstly**, they had not progressed in understanding as they ought. When they should have been able to teach others they had need that somebody teach them again the "first principles of the oracles of God" or of what God has spoken/communicated. **Secondly**, in consequence of this lack of progress they had regressed in their spiritual acumen. The Greek sometimes implies a change of state well rendered in the KJV "are become" (Barnes; also Word Study). They had passed from that condition in which much was to be hoped of them when they first received the gospel into this present frame of mind in which they required milk and not solid food.

The figure of milk and solid food applied (13-14).

B. Exhortation to "Press on to Perfection" (6:1-20)

Readers challenged to develop the necessary maturity to handle complex material (1-3).

The intention of the writer (1a). Acknowledging the immaturity of the readers, and including himself in the challenge, the writer exhorted "let us go on to perfection (teleiotes)". Failing to develop as could have been expected and actually relapsing the danger existed that they would completely apostatize. The penman determined to press ahead despite their dullness and deal with the meatier subject of Melchizedek which he did in ch. 7. The building blocks could not be repeatedly relaid; at some point in the development of a church or individual the superstructure must be put in place and so he would continue with the presentation concerning Melchizedek despite their spiritual limitations.

Word definitions.

1. Adjectives.

- Teleios (5046): "Goal, purpose. Finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing" (Heb 5:14; 9:11) (Word Study).

2. Nouns.

- Teleiotes (5047): "From *teleios* (5046), perfect, one who reaches a goal. Perfection or perfectness, stressing the realization of an end in view, the state achieved when a goal has been accomplished" (Heb 6:1) (Word Study).
- teleiosis (5050): denotes "a fulfilment, completion, perfection, an end accomplished as the effect of a process" (Heb 7:11) (Vine).

3. Verbs.

- Teleioo (5048): "To bring to an end by completing or perfecting" (Heb 2:10) (Vine).

Some examples of fundamental teaching to be left behind (1b-2).

1. "Repentance from dead works" (1b). The same phrase is used in Heb 9:13-14 where it has reference to sin.
2. "Faith toward God" (11:6).
3. "The doctrine of baptisms (baptismos)". Later in this book (9:10) "baptismos" is used of washings within the Mosaic Law and Mark employs the term to stand for ceremonial washings (Mk 7:4, 8) required by the Pharisees. Likely the doctrine in question is that teaching which distinguishes between these various baptisms and is able to point to the one valid baptism (Eph 4:5).
4. The "laying on of hands". This practise having to do with the communicating of spiritual gifts by an apostle to another Christian (Ac 8:14-19; 2 Tim 1:6) and the appointment to office within the church (Ac 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim 4:14).
5. "Of resurrection of the dead".
6. "Of eternal judgement". Along with the first three fundamentals, these last two featured heavily in Paul's preaching (Ac 17:30-31; 24:15, 24-25).

The expressed intention confirmed subject to God's will (3). These Christians could not continually be occupied with rudimentary elements; they needed to press on to perfection and this he meant to do if God permitted (Ac 16:6-8). Verses 4-8 elaborate upon the danger of a no growth scenario. The one who contents himself with merely staying at a particular spiritual level, treading water is liable to fall back and possibly to the extent where it is impossible to be renewed to repentance. Spiritual stagnation is not to be taken lightly - amongst other things because of what it can lead to (Heb 3:12, 13; 10:26).

The danger of apostasy emphasised (4-6).

The danger specified (4a, 6a). If in the defined circumstances (6b) individuals fall away, "it is impossible (adunatos)... to renew them again to repentance."

1. It is tempting to blunt the sense so as to mean "very difficult" but this would not be true to the Grk. which means "unable to be done" (Thayer). In its use in the gospels what was impossible for men to achieve could be brought about by God (Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 18:27). Note the unmistakable meaning of "not possible" as used elsewhere in Hebrews (6:18; 10:4; 11:6).
2. Thus an individual who fails to grow might regress, and regress to the extent that in the normal run of things he can no longer be reached by man.

The characteristics of the one in focus (3-5). These can only describe a Christian in the fullest sense; one who at one time had obeyed the gospel and committed himself to Christ. These are those who had "tasted the heavenly gift", the blessings of the Spirit. Earlier he had described his readers as "partakers of the heavenly calling" (3:1). And so the passage likely is referring to salvation and its blessings brought to us through the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38). Metaphorically "geuo signifies to experience or undergo" (Vine). And so the explanation that these are those who had just "had a taste" does not stand up to scrutiny.

The defined circumstance – they "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (6b).

1. Those who cannot be renewed to repentance are those who renounce Christ and in this condition alienate themselves from God's grace, the one source of salvation. Of course, the possibility that such through God's providence might have a change of mind and recognise the folly of their rejection of Christ is not removed. As Barnes puts it: "There is but one way of salvation. Having tried that, and then renounced it, how could they then be saved? The case is like that of a drowning man. If there was but one plank by which he could be saved, and he should get on that, and then push it away and plunge into the deep, he must die. Or if there was but one rope by which the shore could be reached from a wreck, and he should cut that and cast it off, he must die. Or if a man were sick, and there was but one kind of medicine that could possibly restore him, and he should deliberately dash that away, he must die. So in religion. There is but *one way* of salvation. If a man deliberately rejects that, he must perish."

2. In the context of the book the warning is to Jews who were contemplating the possibility of disowning Jesus to avoid renewed persecution. The temptation to do that would increase if they failed to develop in their appreciation of what Christ offered as High Priest.

A figurative illustration from nature (7-8).

The purpose of the comparison is to show the consequences that would follow if the Christian does not make use of God's blessings and what might follow should these not be built upon.

A better outcome expected (9-12).

The things confidently anticipated (9). The land overrun by thorns and briars was near to cursing But the things seen in them were "things that accompany salvation". Note:

1. "Belong to (ASV marg., ESV and RSV)". Robertson explains the phrase as meaning "Things holding on to salvation".
2. The phrase is explained by 10:35: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great reward"; if they abandoned their confidence they would lose their reward.

The reason for confidence (10). God is not unjust/unrighteous to forget their previous labour of love towards His name in ministering to the saints. God would not forget it but neither should they (10:32-34; Mt 10:41-42).

A condition attached (11-12).

1. Show a like and unflinching diligence until the end (11). The end must match the beginning (3:6, 14; 4:14).
2. To the end that they did not become "sluggish" but rather imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise (12; cf. 11:4-40; 13:7).

The example of Abraham (13-20).

One who through faith and patience obtained the promise (13-15).

1. He was called to go to a land, not knowing where he was to go, his faith remaining firm (11:8).
2. In that land when he and Sarah were passed natural child bearing age God promised that they would have a son. Not being weak in faith Abraham took no account of his body being as good as dead nor the deadness of Sarah's Womb but staggered not through unbelief (11:9-12; Rom 4:17-22). His faith withstood that trial also.
3. When Isaac the promised child was born, he was to be sacrificed (6:13-15; Gen 22:15-18) and Abraham patiently endured while being tested yet again.

One whose circumstances prompted God to demonstrate the cast-iron certainty of His promises (16-18).

1. The significance of an oath sworn among men is that it is the ultimate surety provided for confirmation to settle the truth of a matter (16).
2. This custom was then adopted by man's creator to give greater assurance that His promise would be honoured. This does not give His word more certainty but from man's standpoint it appears to be so (17-18). Studying the context of Gen 22 shows the promise to be that of salvation in Christ. It begins in v. 15 and continues through v. 18 (unquoted in Hebrews): "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." This text is applied by Peter to the coming of and blessing to be received in Jesus (Ac 3:25). God desiring to show the immutability of His word to the heirs of the promise accommodated His language to the ways of men. Not only did He make the promise but He confirmed/underlined His commitment to the thing that He had said by swearing an oath – in both of which things (His word and the oath) it was impossible for Him to lie. Men swear by a greater being but because God could appeal to no greater he swore by himself (13). Notice the form that this oath takes – "as I live..." (Num 14:21).

The significance of this hope illustrated in two images (19-20a). Because this promise has to do with salvation, the apparent strengthening of this assurance has tremendous implications for us.

1. An anchor accomplishes for a ship what hope does for the soul (19). Hope is represented on some ancient coins as an anchor (JFB). A vessel struggling to reach a port over a boisterous and dangerous sea when it gets within range will manoeuvre its anchor into the harbour using a boat so as to prevent being driven back out into the tempest again. The ship then rides out the storm in confidence swinging at the end of the cable knowing its anchor is sure and steadfast. (Clarke) This hope enters within the veil (9:3; 9:23-24; 10:19-20); it is the hope of heaven.
2. Christ is depicted as a forerunner (prodromos) having entered beyond the veil (20). The Grk. word is used of "those who were sent before to take observations," acting as scouts, especially in military matters" (Vine). And so in this second image which is really a development of the first the certainty of God delivering His promise is depicted in military strategy. As a commander will send special troops to search out enemy territory so Christ has gone in advance of His brethren to ensure all is safe.

The type of Christ's priesthood re-stated (20b). He was made a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.