

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 5, Verses 11-14 and Chapter 6, Verses 1- 8
Notes From Class on October 6, 2009
Last Revised on (October 26, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV"), then it may help you to have the handout which I have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews, Chapters 1 through 6.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started....

Review

OK. Last week we finished reading up to Chapter 5, verse 11.

Detailed notes for all of that have been posted to the Google group site.

Nevertheless tonight, as usual, let's begin with a brief review.

Hebrews is a document written in Greek around the **end of the First Century A.D**

It is perhaps best thought of as the text of **sermon**,

to be preached to a particular church, one which the preacher **knew**.

One of his main objectives was to encourage them to **hold fast** to their confession of faith.

It seems most of them had long before confessed their faith in Christ, but that some were in danger of "**falling away**".

This theme of holding fast **until the end** and not falling away, of perseverance as the key condition and main proof of our salvation, is a constant and pervasive theme in Hebrews.

Chapters 1 and 2 speak of the **unqualified supremacy** of Christ.

At the end of Chapter 2 and the start of Chapter 3 we are first asked to consider Christ our **priest**.

This metaphor is **pervasive** in Hebrews but rarely seen elsewhere in the the Bible.

Jesus is held forth as a priest-like figure who **mediates** between his people and God, making purification for their sins.

Right away the author shapes this metaphor by making it plain that Christ is superior to **Moses**.

We are urged **to** hold fast to our confession of Christ and **not** to behave as did the Exodus generation in Israel, who rejected Moses.

Contemplation of the Exodus dominates **Chapter 3** and continues through the first **11** verses of **Chapter 4**.

This is a complex passage but the moral of the story is clear : **believe God and obey him** or **suffer the consequences**.

The consequences ... of willful disobedience of God's **word** ... can be severe...and eternal?!

Near the end of Chapter 4, we read:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (4:12-13)

We remember (1:1-2a) that the word of God has been spoken from the beginning...at various times and in various ways to the fathers by the **prophets**...and now to us at the end of times by a **Son!**

We are **all** naked and exposed. We are willfully disobedient, just as the Exodus generation in Israel was, and all subsequent generations in Israel were, and all men everywhere have been since Adam.

Israel had Moses and Aaron and other priests descended from Aaron, all of whom foreshadowed Christ by interceded for them with God.

But Israel was constantly falling away.

We have Christ, **Himself** as our great high priest. The last paragraph of Chapter 4 reads:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high

priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (4:14-16)

God's word reveals to us that God is **right** about everything. We agree with Him and are nevertheless **incapable** of obeying him, because we in ourselves are utterly wicked.

We desperately need help. And by the grace of God, we we have all the help we need: Jesus, God's only begotten Son, who is for us (among many other things) a "**great high priest**."

In our times of need, we can expect to receive from him **mercy** and **grace**

So, let's hold fast!

Hebrews, Chapter 5, Verses 1-10 (Last Week's Lesson)

The first 10 verses of Chapter 5, our lesson from last week, begin a sort of meditation on the ways in which our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is also for us like a "**great high priest**."

Will someone please read Hebrews Chapter 5, Verses 1-10 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Will someone now please read those verses in English (ESV)

1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Thank you.

So as we discussed last week, there are essentially three aspects of the Levitical priesthood that the author wishes to highlight here in this passage we just reread:

(1) the **role** of a high priest as the intercessor for his people before God,

(2) the **character** that a high priest must have if he is to be effective in this role, and

(3) the fact a priest must and may only be **appointed** by God.

These three points are developed in that order in verses 1-4 for ordinary **Levitical** priests, as we discussed in considerable detail last week.

Then starting in verse 5, these same three points are addressed in reverse order, as they apply to **the Son of God**.

The point about God having **appointed** Jesus is made in verses **5** and **6**, with two quotations from scripture.

The first quotation is from **Psalm 2, verse 7** (where Jesus is proclaimed by God to be his begotten **son**).

If you think about it, by far the **Greatest** and the **Highest** of the all the **Great High Priests** must be the one who is also the begotten **son of God!**

The second quotation is from Psalm 110, verse 4, where God appoints his son a priest **forever**, of the order of **Melchizedek**.

You may remember that verse **one** of Psalm 110 is the one that speaks of Jesus taking his seat at **God's right hand**.

Verse 4, quoted here, confirms the **express appointment** of the Son of God as a **priest**,

and makes it plain that the fact of Jesus not being an Aaronic or Levitical priest does not in any way disqualify him from the **eternal** priesthood now under consideration.

On the contrary, Jesus is a **way** better priest!!

But he is not **just** a way better priest; he is the son of God and God!!

That is where the comparison breaks down: Jesus is in a **category** of his own!! The **God** category.

But even though he was and is an eternal priest like Melchizedek and the only begotten Son of God and God, Jesus came to know....through **his own personal human experience**...how desperately men **struggle** in prayer and how greatly they **suffer** though **obedience** to God. (Verses 7 & 8).

Since **nobody** else, except Jesus, has ever lived a life without sin, nobody but Jesus has **ever** endured the struggle and suffering of perfect obedience to God!!!

Thus **he** became not only the perfect priest but also the perfect sacrifice and therefore the **source** of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Jesus paid **once** for **all**. And so ends my **review**.

Are there any questions before we move into **tonight's** lesson?

Hebrews, Chapter 5, Verses 11-14

Will someone please read Hebrews Chapter 5, **Verses 11-14** in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Will someone now please read those verses in English (ESV)

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

12 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,

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

14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Thank you.

(Verse 11)

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

The author has very much more to say about Jesus as a high priest..

Indeed he started getting into that subject early, way back in Chapter 2, verse 17.

He continues to work with it all the way to the end of this document (c.f. 13:11)

The priesthood of Christ is mainly what he wants to talk about, or so it seems to me.

But he does not expect it to be easy to explain the priesthood of Christ to these people.

Because they have become dull of hearing.

Q. And how does he know they have become dull of hearing?

A. Because what they have heard before now seems not to have advanced them as it should have.

(Verse 12)

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,

One would think, based on what they had heard over a long period of time, that they would have become teachers by now.

Instead they themselves remain in need of the most basic instruction.

What's worse, it is instruction that they had already mastered in the past, and now need to be taught again.

The area in which they are losing ground is called here "basic principles" of the "oracles of God."

The term translated "basic principles" is intended to mean really easy stuff, such as even children can understand.

The term translated "oracles of God" was usually understood to include the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament.

Within the context of this sermon, the "oracles of God" are probably also understood to include the basic elements of the confession of faith of the early Christian Church.

These people are actually beginning to "forget" some of those most basic things which God's people must understand, if they are truly to be and to remain God's people.

The **metaphor** here used of milk and solid food was common in that day both inside and outside of the Bible (c.f. 1 Co 3:1, 1 Pet 2:2)

The meaning is clear, isn't it?

One of the events that marks the passage of a person from infancy into childhood is being **weened** from breast milk and starting to eat solid food, like grown up people do.

He is saying that they are not behaving like grown-up Christians but, rather, have actually **regressed** and become like **babies** again in their understanding.

That's why it is difficult to explain things to them which require maturity to understand.

(Verse 13)

for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

There **is** such a thing as "**spiritual maturity**" (a phrase we use rather a lot in our day)

But spiritual maturity cannot be achieved without maturity in handling God's **word** in the Bible.

The Word and the Spirit belong together. One **cannot** be mature in one of these and not the other.

One who is **unskilled** in handling the Word of Righteousness will be "**spiritually immature**" also.

(Verse 14)

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Conversely, one who **is** spiritually mature **will** be able to handle more advanced Biblical teaching.

Why? Because a spiritually mature person has practice in **distinguishing** good from evil.

We are talking here about what is good and evil in **God's** sight (not "ethics" in a secular sense)

Surely we all know that this is true.

And surely we can see that this is **not** about intellectual capacity or education.

We all know brilliant and well educated people, including some who are brilliant and well educated in Biblical and Theological studies who are absolute **babies** when it comes to understanding the Word of God.

And we all know people who have a profound and beautiful understanding of God's word despite having very little formal education and even very limited intelligence.

This is all about what **God** accomplishes **in** people and not what we can accomplish alone.

Anyhow, based on what our preacher has said to these people, we would sort of expect him to go back and revisit the basics --- things they had seemingly forgotten.

But, instead, he surprises us!

Hebrews, Chapter 6, Verses 1-8

Will someone please read Hebrews Chapter 6, Verses 1-8 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Will someone now please read those verses in English (ESV)

1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

3 And this we will do if God permits.

4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

7 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Thank you.

(Verses 1 and 2)

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

As I said before, most have found it surprising that our preacher should propose to go on to maturity when he has just said that his listeners still need to be taught "elementary doctrine."

To me this suggests that what is in mind here is a kind of maturity which can be pursued without having mastered the basics,

and which may actually help one to apprehend the basics.

to illustrate the sort of "elementary doctrine" that the preacher will **NOT** be talking about at this time, he mentions six elements, in verses 1 and 2.

The first pair of these is **repentance** from dead works and **faith** toward God.

Most agree that "**dead works**" means, simply, **sin**.

Repentance from sin and faith in God are central to the faith of **both** Christians **and** Jews.

There is perhaps **nobody** in the congregation who fails to understand these things, at least **intellectually**.

Notice in verse 1 that he uses the word "**foundation**" and this helps us see what is going on here.

The preacher does **not** despise the foundation or seek to **remove** it but, rather, wishes to **build** on it.

A builder who never goes beyond the foundation is the one who ultimately despises the foundation, not the one who properly uses the foundation by building on it!

The next pair of foundational concepts are **instructions** about **washings** and **laying on of hands**

It is possible but not likely that the plural noun translated "washings" refers only to what we call **baptisms**.

Likewise we cannot know what he has in mind in connection with the **laying on of hands**.

Finally in verse 2 he mentions the **resurrection** of the dead and eternal **judgment**.

Again both of these are foundational to Christianity and to several Jewish sects also (e.g. Pharisees).

Our author does not deny or diminish any foundational point, he just refuses to talk about them now!

(Verse 3)

And this we will do if God permits.

Instead our author intends to **build** on the foundation, which they at least once had, and go on to **maturity**.

There is one condition, of course.

He will do this "**if God permits.**"

This caveat is fairly standard among Christians and Jews.

Nobody can do **anything** without (in a certain sense) God's **permission**.

Certainly no preacher can expect to take anyone to maturity without the active participation of God.

Spiritual maturity is God's **own** work, after all.

However our preacher means to issue **more** than this standard caveat

(Verses 4 through 6)

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

He says that there are certain people for which it is **impossible** to come to maturity

He describes this class of people as those who have "**fallen away**" after once having been enlightened etc.

I think it is fair to say that this is the same kind of "falling away" against which he has been warning his listeners throughout this sermon.

It has generally been understood and agreed (with the notable exception of Tertullian) that what is in view here is not just sin, even very serious sin, but **apostasy**.

In other words we are considering people who have once **confessed** Christ as their Lord and Savior but later **renounced** Him as such.

The preacher is **not** accusing **any** of his listeners of **being** apostate.

On the contrary, he **assures** them in verse 9 that they are **not** apostate **but** saved.

It is because they **are** saved that he warns them of the danger of seeming to deny Christ.

This does **not** mean (by the way) that a person can once be saved and later lose their salvation.

Some people think that such a thing is possible, but I can't even understand what that might **mean**.

However as a practical matter, we all know people who at **first** seem to be saved and **later** seem not to be saved,

and having once renounced their faith in Christ, such people are often remarkably resistant to the gospel,

it is almost as if they had been vaccinated against it.

Perhaps such people were never truly saved in the first place.

Perhaps they are not truly lost now.

Perhaps they are beyond restoration and maturity in this life, even though their souls are safe eternally.

God knows these things. And we do **NOT** know!

Just as we do **not** know the eternal destination of the Exodus generation in Israel, only their sad failure to enter the Promised Land in **this** lifetime.

And our preacher does not seem to be **interested** in such distinctions,

His main objective here, it seems to me, is **rhetorical** and **practical** and not **theological**.

Here and elsewhere he simply wishes to **encourage** these people to hear and obey God and also to **warn** them against the dangerous possibility of being disobedient and dull of hearing, but without scaring them so badly as to **discourage** them.

I think that is what **most** preachers are trying to accomplish.

(Verse 7)

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

Here we get a useful parable, similar to several that **Jesus** told and at least one that he acted out (cursing the fig tree).

God **blesse**s productive land

Of course the land **itself**, the **rain** that fell on it, and the **seeds** that were planted in it, and everything **else** there is comes from **God**, in the first place.

Certainly none of these elements (land, rain, seeds, etc.) can **themselves** claim credit for what God has accomplished.

Nevertheless God in his superabundant **grace** actually rewards the land for the good work he accomplishes in it.

Such is the Kingdom of God. And the economy of Grace!

Jesus taught this over and over again: (Parable of the Talents as eg. Mt. 25:28)

(Verse 8)

But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

But land that produces **nothing** good, only thorns and thistles is **manifestly** worthless and will finally be consumed in fire.

The absence of useful crops and the presence of the thorns and thistles is near to being cursed.

I think this is very similar to what was seen in the Exodus generation in Israel.

The people were **chosen** by God but they grumbled, disobeyed, and rebelled.

Moses interceded and God **forgave** them, many times, but we are left wondering about their place in eternity.

All that we know for certain is that, in **this** life, it became **impossible** for them to enter the Promised Land.

Likewise those who seem to be part of the **church** but who resemble the Exodus generation in Israel or the field filled with thorns and thistles are well advised to **repent** as **soon** as possible, and then to **strive** to come to **maturity** and **hold fast** to the **end**,

because the day may come when this is no longer **possible** in this lifetime, and who knows about eternity!

This is a **threat**, sure enough, but one that is intended for their benefit, and for our benefit.

Now our preacher needs to **balance** it with some **assurance**.

n.b. this is where we ran out of time in class on October 6. On October 13 the class continued reading at Verse 9 of Chapter 6. GGR