

HEBREWS

4:14 – 5:10

Introduction

The practical application of the Book of Hebrews can be stated in two words: “**Hold fast!**” These two words occur three times in the book¹ and capture the essence of all the exhortations.

“Hold fast” is the translation of a single word in the Greek language, the word *krateo* (*krat-eh'-o*). It has various meanings; among them are these three: *to continue to hold, to not let go, and to hold the hand.*

Have you ever been in a situation with a small child when you told them how important it was to tightly hold your hand and not let go? It was really you holding their hand, keeping them safe as you crossed the busy street or walked through the crowded mall. It was your strength and wisdom guiding and directing... But you nevertheless urged them to “hold fast.”

That is the idea here in Hebrews - with one exception. As God's spiritual sons and daughters we exercise a greater freedom to **let go** of His hand and go our own way. Trials and troubles... Sufferings and sacrifices... Problems and persecutions... In these we are tempted to *release* rather than *retain* our grip on the Lord. Instead we are exhorted to “hold fast... that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Our text reveals two qualities of the “help” we receive from holding fast to Jesus: It is *sufficient* help, and it is *sympathetic* help. We'll organize our thoughts around those two points: #1 Sufficient Help To “Hold Fast!” Is Available When You Come To Your Great High Priest, and #2 Sympathetic Help To “Hold Fast!” Is Available When You Come To Your Great High Priest.

¹ 3:6, 4:14, & 10:23

#1 Sufficient Help To “Hold Fast!”
Is Available When You Come To Your Great High Priest
(4:14 & 16)

This book was originally written to Hebrew Christians who were being severely persecuted for their faith in Jesus. They were considering a return to Jewish ritual religion in order to relieve some of their distress. To return was simply out of the question! They would be letting go of God at a time when they ought to “hold fast!”

Throughout the book the writer is arguing that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything the Jewish ritual religion prefigured. Chapter four begins the longest section in the book. From here through chapter ten the writer will compare Jesus to the Jewish priesthood with its Temple and sacrifices.

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.

Some of us come from a religious background and upbringing in which priests were made to be extremely important. This was especially true of the first century Hebrew Christians. Christians **do** have a priest – *it’s Jesus!*

Jesus is declared to be the “great High Priest.” He is “great” for at least two reasons: He has “passed through the heavens,” and He is “the Son of God.”

“Passed through the heavens” is a phrase that had a figurative meaning for Hebrew Christians. Once a year the Jewish high priest would *pass through* the veil in the Temple into the holy of holies to minister before the ark of the covenant. He would then turn-around and exit the holy of holies until the next year. Jesus is *greater* than any Jewish high priest in that He has passed through the heavens into the actual presence of God.

Jesus is *greater* still in that He was and is the unique “Son of God”; He was and is both God and man.

The Hebrew Christians should “hold fast [their] confession.” The KJV says “hold fast your profession.” They should hold fast to their

profession of faith in Jesus Christ, Whom they had confessed with their mouth as Lord and Savior. To return to the ministry of a merely human priest behind the veil on earth would be ridiculous.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

These two verses summarize the teaching of this section. Verse fifteen says Jesus is sympathetic; verse sixteen says He is sufficient. The writer will expand on Jesus' *sympathy* in chapter five. For now let's look at His *sufficiency* in verse sixteen.

“Boldly” means with *confidence*. As I stated earlier, once a year the Jewish high priest would step through the veil into the holy of holies in the Jewish Temple and offer sacrifice before the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. He did not approach God with confidence. He had to first go through a ritual of cleansing and sacrifice for his own sins. I've been told that he had bells on the fringes of his robes and a rope tied to one ankle. If those beyond the veil didn't hear the bells they would know the high priest had been struck dead by God and drag his corpse out. *That would not inspire my confidence!*

When Jesus died on the Cross one of the phenomena you read about is that the veil in the Jewish Temple was torn from top to bottom.² It was torn supernaturally - torn by God - to establish that the way into His presence was open to everyone who would receive His Son as their Savior. There was no longer any need for a priest to once a year tentatively approach God. Jesus *was* and *is* in heaven ministering as your great High Priest before God. You can come confidently to God through Jesus without the interference of a human priest.

I don't want to get sidetracked on priests and the priesthood. Let me simply say that there is no need for a priest... That the Bible teaches the priesthood of all believers in terms of our access to God... And that Jesus is on record in the Book of the Revelation as hating *any* and *all* earthly priesthoods that put obstacles between you and God.

² Matthew 27:51

These Hebrew Christians were suffering in various ways. **You** will suffer in various ways. The writer summarizes all the things that might happen in your life as your “time of need” (v16). It includes physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. In *any* and *every* “time of need” you can personally approach God with the confidence you will “obtain mercy and find grace.” *Mercy* and *grace* are the inexhaustible resources available to help you “hold fast.”

“Mercy” is often defined as *not getting what you deserve*. Among the many meaning of the word “obtain” are *to appraise* and *be amazed*. Come to Jesus in your time of need and you will *appraise* your life and be *amazed* you are *not getting what you deserve!*

What does that mean? I’ve noticed a tendency in my heart to feel I do not *deserve* my trials and sufferings. The truth I’m forgetting is that what I “deserve” as a son of Adam is death and judgment but that God has mercifully saved a wretch like me. **He is not giving me what I deserve!** As a Christian I never get what I truly deserve. When I come to Jesus I can get this appraisal, be amazed, and “hold fast” regardless my trials and sufferings.

When I come to Jesus I also “find grace.” “Find” can mean *perceive*. My perception is changed so that I understand God’s grace is my sufficiency regardless my situation. The Apostle Paul puts this into perspective for us. He was suffering and seeking His Lord. Three times he prayed that his suffering would end. He received this answer from his great High Priest:

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...**”

To which Paul responded, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

God’s mercy and grace are **sufficient** help for all my times of need. I do not need to escape; I can endure by “holding fast.”

The help of your great High Priest is sufficient... And it is **sympathetic**.

#2 Sympathetic Help To “Hold Fast!”
Is Available When You Come To Your Great High Priest
(4:15 & 5:1-10)

When you are struggling or suffering you want to talk to someone who truly understands what you’re going through. There is a comfort that comes from their identification with your situation. The remaining verses of our text establish that Jesus **is** that Person more than any other person.

Back in verse fifteen of chapter four we read,

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, *yet* without sin.

“Sympathize” is a word which means *to suffer along with*. It means that Jesus identifies with you and understands exactly what you are going through.

He understands and identifies “with [your] weaknesses” because He “was in all points tempted as we are...” All the possible temptations a human faces fall into one of the three categories that are listed in First John 2:16, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Throughout His life Jesus was subjected to temptations in each of these categories.

For example: After His baptism He was driven into the wilderness where He fasted forty days. Satan came to tempt Him. He was hungry; Satan tempted Him to turn the rocks into bread. It was an appeal to “the lust of the flesh.” Next Satan took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple and encouraged Jesus to throw Himself off, expecting God to save Him. It was an appeal to the pride of life. Finally the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered them to Jesus if He would bow down and worship him. He was tempting Jesus with the lust of the eyes.

Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are.” He understands; He identifies; He is **sympathetic**.

He was tempted as we are, “yet without sin.” Before we get onto a theological sidetrack, let me say this: “Yet without sin” tells me that if I

come to Jesus in my time of need His sympathy can strengthen me to resist temptation and “hold fast.” Jesus was God and man. As a man He was able to depend upon God and overcome the same temptations that I am called upon to overcome.

The theological sidetrack is that scholars argue over whether or not Jesus could have sinned. Was He **not able to sin**? Or was He **able to not sin**? Or put it this way: Was Jesus **able to overcome temptation**, or was it that He **could not be overcome by temptation**? After all, Jesus was the second Adam, and Adam was able to not sin but *did* sin... Yet Jesus was also God in human flesh, and God is *not able* to sin!³

My brain is on fire! What all believers must agree on is that Jesus was tempted by real temptations and that He never sinned. The answer to the question of whether He could or could not have sinned lies somewhere in the mystery of His nature as fully God and fully man. Good, solid Christian scholars hold each position.

The Hebrew Christians were more interested in the practical aspect! They were suffering, losing their grip in the midst of temptation. Jesus was tempted in all points as you are and He did not sin. He is thus said to be able to sympathize with you more than any other Person.

If you had a Hebrew background you would be scratching your head right about now. You’d be wondering how Jesus became a High Priest! He was not a priest at all during His earthly ministry; and He wasn’t from the tribe of Levi from which the priests must be chosen.

The writer exercises patience with his readers and explains how it was that Jesus became our great High Priest. He summarizes his explanation in verse one.

Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

³ This is called the question of impeccability. The term impeccability is from the negative Latin prefix *in + peccare* (to sin). The question is this: Was the last Adam just like the first in every respect? Was He characterized only by the *posse non peccare* (able not to sin)? Or did He differ, being characterized by the *non posse peccare* (not able to sin)?

“Taken from men” means the priest must be a man. “Appointed for men” means the priest must be ordained by God. “Offer both gifts and sacrifices” is the scope of the priest’s ministry. Verses three through ten expand upon these three ideas.

The priest must be a **man**. This is expanded upon in verse two and in verses seven and eight.

Hebrews 5:2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness...

Hebrews 5:7 ...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

Hebrews 5:8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

Verse two simply says that a priest must be human in order to sympathize with the weaknesses of other humans. Verses seven and eight remind you of the humanity of Jesus Christ. The “days of His flesh” covers His entire time on earth. You see His sympathy in His “cries and tears.” Jesus wept outside of Lazarus’ tomb; He wept over Jerusalem; He shed tears and sweat as it were great drops of blood in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what it was to face “death” and put trust in God “to save Him from death.”

“Though He was [the] Son” of God, fully God and omniscient, as a man “He learned obedience.” He experienced what it means to suffer as a man and submit to God’s plan. When Jesus says to “hold fast,” He says it from His experience as a man submitted to God.

The priest must **offer** both gifts and sacrifices. This is expanded upon in verses three and nine.

Hebrews 5:3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer *sacrifices* for sins...

Hebrews 5:9 ...and having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

The writer notes that the Jewish high priest must first make a sacrifice for his own sins before he can minister on behalf of the people.

Jesus had no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself, **but He offered Himself a sacrifice!** Jesus is said to “[have] been perfected.” The word for *perfected* is the same word Jesus spoke from the Cross when He said, “It is **finished**.” He offered Himself as the final, perfect

sacrifice for the sins of the world. As a result He can offer “eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” “Obey” in this context means that you appropriate eternal salvation by obeying God’s one requirement – faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The priest must be **ordained** by God. This is expanded upon in verses four, five, six, and ten.

Hebrews 5:4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Hebrews 5:5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it* was He who said to Him: “*You are My Son, today I have begotten You.*”

Hebrews 5:6 As He also says in another place: “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*”...

Hebrews 5:10 ...called by God as High Priest “*according to the order of Melchizedek,*”

The Jewish priests, including the high priest, were ordained by God. You could not simply go to priest-school. You had to be a descendant of “Aaron,” from the tribe of Levi. So how did Jesus qualify as a priest, seeing He was descended from David in the tribe of Judah?

Glad you asked! God ordained Him to be “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek will be the subject of most of chapter seven. Here is what we need to know today: The writer quotes from Psalm 110 about an incident that occurred in Genesis chapter fourteen. Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews, was met by a priest named Melchizedek. Melchizedek was called the “priest of the most high God.” He blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave tithes to him – both indications that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham.

In their own history there was a prior and a superior priesthood to the priesthood that was established by Moses! Jesus did not qualify as a Levitical priest under the Jewish Law; but He did qualify as a priest and was so ordained by God. Jesus became your great High Priest after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven; He is far superior to any earthly priest.

Conclusion

There is a sense in which your entire life on earth is “your time of need.” Jesus can **sympathize** with you in your time of need. He

knows what it is to be tempted; and because He never succumbed to temptation He can offer you **sufficient** mercy and grace to resist temptation.

“Hold fast!” Put your hand in Jesus’, then hold on and don’t let go!