

time to grow up

hebrews 5

We are in Hebrews chapter 5 this morning, but we're going to backtrack to the last few verses of chapter 4, because there at the end the author starts a new examination of Jesus.

We've seen Him compared to angels and to Moses and now He is contrasted with Aaron and every human high priest.

Along with this new comparison, our author continues to do what he does in this book where he weaves together and places side-by-side Christ and our Christianity.

As he develops more and more of who Christ is and what He has accomplished, he always highlights how we should respond by taking up our Christianity like never before.

So let's look at our text and see what we see.

Hebrews 4.14-5.14 - 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. 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. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

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.”

As He also says in another place:

“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”; 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, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

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.

Because Jesus has replaced all other high priests, because He is greater than Aaron, we who believe in Him can progress further than any Jew that was ever under the Law. This text lays it all out for us that Jesus Christ is the only high priest we would ever need, He is the mediator between God and man, there is no other.

But, God didn't put Jesus into that position so that there would be a greater distance or a greater formality between us and Him, He called Jesus to that position so we could have unrestricted nearness and access to Him.

What this text means is that you and I as believers in Christ can have actual interaction with the God of the Universe any time we want! That is an incredible thing. Our High Priest has invited us all in to nearness with Him.

The problem here was that the Hebrews weren't really very concerned with forward progress in their Christianity. Remember, the author keeps warning them to pay closer attention to their spiritual lives and again in these verses he calls them out and says, "You guys are not paying attention to your forward movement as believers."

Spiritually speaking, the Hebrews were Toys-R-Us kids. I don't want to grow up. I don't want to get out there and exercise. I want to sit in my little personal aquarium and play my games and drink chocolate milk all day.

I can identify with this because if it were up to my son Geno all he would ever eat is milk. We restrict his milk intake so that he's hungry enough to eat peanut butter and jelly!

As the Holy Spirit spoke through this author, He looked at the Hebrew's Christianity in practice and He says, "You're like a baby who won't gain weight. You're not growing."

Ezekiel is just about 6 months old now. At the beginning of a baby's life there are all kinds of scores and measures that the doctors track to make sure things are progressing properly. You've got the APGAR tests and then the regular length/weight/head-circumference measurements. And they have these charts where you see where your kid lands compared to the average. Obviously they're not perfect, but the idea is that the growth charts show a normal pattern of progress and when a baby stops gaining weight for 2, 3, 6 weeks, that is a strong indicator to a pediatrician that something is very wrong.

Here in Hebrews 5 we have a generic spiritual growth chart. A litmus of things a growing Christian should be seeing in their lives as they mature and become more fruitful and move forward in their walk with the Lord.

Remember, it's a walk with the Lord, not a stand with the Lord. Over and over again God speaks to us about growth and progress and development in our relationship with Him. And there are ways for us to tell if we're keeping pace with Jesus, who is leading us somewhere.

There are 3 in our text. We'll take them in order of appearance, even though they're not meant to be understood as chronological in a person's spiritual maturity. It's not that the first one happens, then the second, then the third, they're just 3 important indicators that should be noticeable in our own lives.

The first is in verse 12 - a growing Christian should be able to teach spiritual principles to others.

Not everyone is gifted to teach. Not everyone is anointed to teach, but as we grow in our Christianity we all should be able to pass along our spiritual knowledge to other people. If someone needs to be instructed in how to be saved, we're responsible to teach that to them. A growing Christian should have no problem relaying that information. The delivery can be difficult or nerve-wracking, but the information we should have.

Fast forward a few years into your faith, if a brand new Christian comes along and asks you how to figure out what their spiritual gift is, we should be able to *tell* them how. If a new convert wants to know how a Christian is supposed to live their life, we're the ones who are supposed to tell them. If we can't teach people about our Christianity, we've failed the first litmus.

The problem for the Hebrews was that they weren't internalizing what they were being taught. They'd go to church and hear God's word, hear their pastor speak and it didn't sink in. They weren't ingesting it.

The second spiritual growth test in our text is in verse 13 - a growing Christian should be skilled in the word.

God's word is essential to our lives. That's our sword. Just in the last chapter we're reminded that the Bible is a sword. In Ephesians 6.17 it's listed as our only offensive weapon that we're given by the Spirit in the armor of God.

A Christian who doesn't know his way around the word simply isn't going to do much damage for the Kingdom of God.

The Hebrews were neglecting the word. They were unskilled. The Greek word used in this verse is the same that was used in the study of grammar in the way we would say, "the ABCs." They had the most basic fundamentals down, but that was it. They neglected to move forward in their understanding of God's word.

The ABCs are important, that's where we all start, but if we want to be successful, productive members of society, we've got to move past the ABCs, right? We've got to move on to words and sentences and language.

The same is true with the Bible. It's given for us to study and apply continually in our lives. So, a healthy Christian will be growing in his understanding of the Bible. That doesn't mean we all go to seminary. That's not what we're instructed to do. We're instructed to feed on the word and allow it to nourish our lives.

The third spiritual growth test is in verse 14 - a growing Christian will exercise discernment.

Now, I think that many Christians go through life without exercising discernment, but we really shouldn't be intimidated by discernment as an important fruit in our lives. It seems a little hard to grasp, but our author here gives it as one of the basic, noticeable demonstrations of growth.

Discernment means that we're able to decide the difference between good and evil, between what is Godly and what is not Godly.

That would be more difficult if we hadn't been given the Holy Spirit to live with us all day, every day. The Holy Spirit is given to help us and counsel us and *give* us discernment. We're not called to generate it ourselves, we're simply called to exercise it. We're called to weigh our decisions and our words and our thoughts through the discernment of what is Godly and what is not, which is supplied by the Holy Spirit.

You see people in the Bible often exercising incredible discernment. Whether it's the apostles or guys like Nehemiah. They were discerning truth and what was right, even when the evidence in front of them was confusing. And the truth is, that discernment is available to all of us. And a growing Christian *exercises* discernment in their lives. Meaning, we filter the things we think and the things we hear and our choices through what the Holy Spirit says.

These things are the marks of a Christian who's growing and moving forward with the Lord.

And they're possible because Jesus Christ has perfected the work and office of the high priest. He has come and perfected what Aaron and his sons represented to mankind.

When Aaron or one of his descendants were your priest, there was only so far you could go. There was an outer court, and an inner court. There was an imposed distance because the system couldn't be perfected by a sinful human being.

There was also the sense that every Sabbath you had to start over. A person could grow in their personal relationship with the Lord, but before Christ came and died, every Sabbath you were back at square one - needing your sins atoned for. There was a perpetual stall in your spiritual progress.

But then Jesus comes along and takes the reigns of that system and changes everything!

Instead of atoning for sin every week, Jesus Christ has purged our sins forever. When we're saved, He washes us clean and puts us on the *other* side of the cross and says, "Head that way!"

Instead of you having to go to the Temple to do business with God, Jesus Christ comes along and says, "I'll abide in you! I'll make your heart My temple!"

Instead of a priest hearing from God and then delivering that message to you, the word of God has been completed and delivered right to us so we can feed on it any time we want.

Instead of coming *between* you and God, like a human high priest does, Jesus tore open the veil of the temple to give us unrestricted access. If we can pause for a moment to think about that, hopefully we're encouraged to get in the throne room as often as we can. God says you don't have to pray to a saint or a priest or a voice mail - we get to boldly interact with Him any time we want as we pray and submit to the Holy Spirit.

Because of all these changes that Jesus has brought as high priest, we should never be stuck at square 1 in our spiritual lives. A Christian shouldn't stay stuck on the fundamentals or really

any other stage in their Christian life. There should always be a forward momentum and a fruitfulness when it comes to our Christianity.

If we are stuck, if we can't seem to push into the next level, Hebrews would say we need to grow up. Because Jesus has paved the way for us to get all the way to fruitfulness and contentment and satisfaction. He didn't just clear out the first 50 feet - He paved the way *all the way*.

But it's on us whether we're going to be like Caleb, who took his inheritance, or if we're going to be like those other Israelite tribes who, inexplicably and without need, just chose not to take their allotment in the promised land.

So move boldly forward in your Christianity today. Grow and progress.

How do we do that? Well, take the 3 tests given in this text as a starting point. Increase your understanding of God's word. Increase your reliance on the Holy Spirit in your decision-making. And get your questions answered so that you can answer them when they're asked.

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