

Callaway Men's Retreat 2022

Hebrews 5-7

What's the big deal about Jesus' high priesthood?

I. Introduction

From Hebrews 2:17 to chapter 13 Jesus' position as high priest is highlighted. Until I studied Hebrews, I didn't know I needed a high priest. Thankfully, God knows what we need, meets that need in Christ and then tells us what we need it. It turns out Jesus' high priesthood is essential and exclusive. It brings wholesale changes in our lives and unavoidable responsibilities.

Biblically, a priest represents God to men and men to God, and this always includes sacrifices by the priest. From Adam to Moses each man was appointed by God as his own priest. He offered his own family's sacrifices to God. Abel, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all offered sacrifices and were their own priests. This remained true for around 2500 years until, at Mt. Sinai, as Israel was about to become a nation, God changed the rule. Through Moses, God appointed an exclusive class of priests including a high priest, all taken from the tribe of Levi through Aaron and his descendants. This new exclusive, professional class of priests was mandated for the nation of Israel in the Mosaic Law until Jesus died and rose from the dead. In the New Testament Epistles, God replaced this Mosaic priesthood and appointed all Christians as priests. We are a "kingdom of priests" (Revelation 5:10), "a royal priesthood" (1Peter 2:9). This is why, as Jesus died, and the veil of the temple was torn open from top down; giving all believers direct access to God. The book of Hebrews clarifies the importance of this change. Once again God wants to relate to each of us one-on-one, through Jesus. The New Testament designates Jesus as our only and permanent High Priest.

II. Old Testament Priests and Jesus – Hebrews 5

Hebrews 5 continues the topic of Jesus' high priesthood. The author points out that priests under the Mosaic Law were appointed by God to act on behalf of men in things pertaining to God. This included making sacrifices and offerings for the people's sins as well as their own. The priest could relate to the people as a co-sinner. But then God appointed His Son as a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This is a very different priesthood from that given through Moses and infinitely better. Note, Jesus is the only perfect Son, High Priest, king, sacrifice, mediator, and God – Man.

Hebrews 5:7 points out that Jesus, while on earth, fervently prayed making requests with loud crying and tears to God who could save Him from death. God heard Him because of his perfect piety. Even though He was God's son, He "learned" obedience in the Garden of Gethsemane. This was the only time God asked Him to do something He didn't want to do. He knew he had to suffer and die spiritually and physically for all of our sins, the cross was why He came the first time; but as a man he struggled within Himself, dreading the experience, but without any doubt He would do it. He knew God's will trumped His desires. It is important to note that obedience is only seen when you don't want to obey.

After His death and resurrection, having been made "perfect" (to complete, to accomplish, i.e. He fulfilled the law by obeying it perfectly and paying the penalty the law demanded for all who failed to obey God's

commands; His purpose). Now, no one can erroneously claim Jesus can't relate to them, understand them, sympathize with them, etc. Revelations 5:9 points out that only He is worthy to open the Book of Judgements at the end of the age. Jesus had moral authority. (Not that He didn't always have it, but that now we couldn't argue otherwise). As a result, He became a source of salvation to all those who obey Him through God's designation of Jesus as our high priest according to the Order of Melchizedek. We are saved forever not just by Jesus being the perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross but also by His ongoing role as High Priest. His death and His high priesthood saved us. Just as we begin to ponder this statement, God pauses with a warning.

III. The Third Warning in Hebrews

Hebrews 5:11- 6:12 – The Problem, The Diagnosis, The Cure and The Risk

In Hebrews 5:11 the writer pauses to note that there is a lot to say regarding Jesus' high priesthood, but it is hard to explain since the listeners have become "dull of hearing". He is frustrated with his audience. It is hard to "translate", to help them understand biblical truth. They had become "dull of hearing", (sluggish, slow and lazy; they didn't listen, they didn't learn and they don't "get it", but they should have). Like a muscle you don't exercise, your ability to understand God's truth atrophies. Simply put, they don't have the ability to grasp some truths in the Bible, they are simply too weak. In Matthew 13:15, Jesus complains that, "the heart of this people has become dull and with their ears they scarcely hear and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears...". This is an issue of the will. They ought to be teaching but need someone to teach them basics of the faith, the elementary principles of the Word of God. They need milk, not solid food which requires chewing and effort to digest. The mere passage of time does not equal maturity. They kept repeating second grade.

1Corinthians 14:20 - "Do not be children in your thinking...but in your thinking be mature"; Ephesians 4:15 - "we are to grow up"; 1Peter2:2 - "like newborn babies long for the pure milk of the word that by it you may grow"; and, 1Corinthians 3:1 - "I could not speak to you as the spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as infants in Christ".

This is not a problem with the Holy Spirit, they weren't doing their part, what God commanded them to do. They were not mastering His word or growing. Feeding a baby is cute, but feeding an adult is pathetic.

The diagnosis is clear, everyone who partakes (absorbs, ingests, makes it their own, to eat) only of milk is not accustomed (unskilled, inexperienced, ignorant) to the word of righteousness, he's an infant. Solid food is for the mature (complete, perfect; the root - the point aimed at). The mature in the process of actively growing in their faith. They grow because they apply what they learn and go on to learn new things in the Bible. They put God's word into practice by application. This trains (exercises) their senses allow them to perceive the world accurately and to discern good and evil.

There are two words for "good" in the Greek, kalos, referring to things which appear to be good, and agathos, things that are good inherently, by nature, intrinsically good. There are also two words in the Greek for evil, poneros, that which has the effect or influence of evil, and kalos, things which are intrinsically worthless, depraved or injurious. In Hebrews 5:14 kalos, the appearance of good; and, kalos, intrinsically worthless, depraved, injurious are used. It is a cross parallel meaning somethings may appear

to be good but are intrinsically evil. Examples would be: not exercising church discipline when appropriate; the admonition that mature Christians shouldn't fear God; seeking wealth so you can fund worthwhile causes; thinking you can be absolutely certain of salvation (so that no faith is required); and, letting women teach men in church.

Hebrews 12:11 "all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet, to those who have been trained by it, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"; 1Corinthians 2:15 "the spiritual man appraises all things"; Philippians 1:9, Paul prays for their "discernment"; Matthew 28:20 "teaching them to obey"; and, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work".

Hebrews 6:1-2 describes the cure - leaving, (moving on from) from the elementary teachings of the Bible and pressing on to maturity. i.e., never stop growing, not laying again a foundation (substructure, what you build on). As 1Corinthians 3-11 states, "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid which is Christ Jesus", than the author admonishes His listeners to build on that foundation. Examples of basic principles are given, specifically repentance from dead works (doing things to earn a relationship with God); faith toward God (the means of salvation); washings (baptism and Old Testament bathings); laying on of hands (prayer and commissionings); resurrection of the dead; and eternal judgement. There is no one secret, silver bullet, one answer, one experience, or one insight. Learn but keep growing and moving forward. Never camp out on one truth, get the whole counsel of God.

Hebrews 6:3-12 is a warning for failure to apply the cure. The author invites us to do just that, IF God permits. IF means maybe, maybe not. You take a risk if you don't grow spiritually or apply God's word. God may close the door on new revelation for you. It is dangerous to traffic an unapplied truth. Esau didn't value God's promises and as a result, "afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance though he sought for it with tears." Likewise, in Matthew 13:11 Jesus states, "to you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." Simply put, God cut them off from His truth and they didn't know it. Seeing, they didn't see and hearing, they didn't hear. There can be a point of no return and you cannot be certain when that point is reached. God owes you nothing. Press on now, while you can. God expects you to know His Bible, interpret it and develop applications you can defend. He is patient, but He does set limits on His patience.

Hebrews 6:4-6 is where the fight starts. These verses have produced as much debate as almost any passage in the New Testament. It reads, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and powers of age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame."

There are three basic positions regarding this passage. First, the people He is warning are saved but risk losing their salvation. This is an Armenian viewpoint. This view holds that our minds are not depraved and our salvation is based on the exercise of our free will only, without God's help. We are perfectly capable of understanding the gospel and accepting it with no action by God. They reject election by God.

In other words, these people are saved, but risk losing their salvation. If this position is true, it is clear from verse 6 that you cannot be saved again if you lose it. ("It is impossible to renew them again to repentance") This position also ignores any action by God (the reason we pray for the lost) in salvation. He does not draw us, give us His Holy Spirit or select us for salvation before the foundation of the world.

The second position is that the audience was never saved. They may have been "enlightened", but they had no real Holy Spirit understanding; they may have "tasted of the heavenly gift", but they didn't really digest it; they may have been "partakers of the Holy Spirit" but were not in possession of Him; they may have "tasted the good word of God and of the powers of the age to come", but they were not truly alive. The process of regeneration was aborted, they were the seed thrown on the rocky soil. This position raises the question, how they could fall away from something they never had? Also, it is problematic because the terminology used above elsewhere in the New Testament is used specifically of people who are saved.

The third option is that these are believers whose sins and failure to do their part to grow give them no "assurance" they are saved. They think, "if I were really a follower of Christ, I would have my act together, maybe I was never really saved." But Hebrews 6:9 says, "we are convinced of better things concerning you and things that accompany salvation." Likewise, Hebrews 6:11 states, "we desire that each of you show the same diligence so as to realize the "full assurance" of hope until the end. These statements clarify the warning. Salvation is based on Jesus' performance, not ours. There is a difference between the fact of salvation and the feeling of salvation. Their solution is to move forward in the faith, not go back again to a second salvation experience. In their failure to grow, they returned to the cross in their desperate search for another conversion experience, when in fact they needed diligence and effort, not going backwards, but going forward. (HEB 6:1) They were going around in circles and stumbling over their lack of assurance of salvation. Hebrews 6:13-20, immediately following the warning, emphasizes that salvation is based on the promise of God paid for by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Hebrews 6:4-5 is clear "in the case of those who have been" enlightened" (illuminated, to make to see), "taste" the heavenly gift (experience it), were made "partakers" (cause to be a participant, a sharer, to put it to use, to be a partner), of the Holy Spirit and "tasted" the good work of the Lord and "powers of the age to come" (miraculous, supernatural power). The language which is almost overkill and includes very clear terminology for salvation. Hebrews 6:6 notes that they have "fallen away" which in the Greek means to fall alongside, to stumble (root-fall near). It is a much milder term than used in Hebrews 3:12, where the Greek words translated "fall away" mean to depart from, to revolt, to leave. These are believers who may have sinned but have not turned from the faith. This is why it is impossible to renew them to repentance, you cannot be re-saved you can't lose your salvation. God guarantees that ROM. 8:3, 34-39).

David, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, knew his sin impacted him, but didn't cancel his relationship with God; we go to the throne of grace to receive help and grace because we are saved.

But, if you are not growing, you don't feel secure in your relationship with Jesus and, if you are not secure, you can't focus on growing. You are burdened by guilt and feel disqualified and discouraged. You are

frozen. HEB6:7 & 8 is a short parable illustrating this. Ground drinks rain and brings forth useful vegetation (fruit) to those for whose sake it was also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is “worthless” and “close” (near) to being “cursed” (depraved), and ends up being burned over. The fruit is gone, the ground survives. 1COR 3:15 states, “if any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet as through fire”. Just the fruit is burned, the man goes to heaven.

HEB 6:9-12 is the point of the warning in a nutshell. The author is convinced of “better things for them”, and things that accompany salvation”. God has not forgotten their work, love in His name and we desire you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end; so that they should not be sluggish (same word as in HEB 5:11). Sluggishness was the problem and diligence is the solution. Imitate those who through “faith and patience” inherit God’s promises. The warning is about lack of effort/obedience to do what God says.

Note: people love to debate this passage but they don’t want to be like the two nerds at an all-night Waffle House who have just been told, by 15 members of a biker gang called the demons, to, “give them the booth they are sitting in or the two of them will be going to the hospital”; and the two nerds sit and argue over whether they meant St. Luke Hospital or City General; just give them the booth.

IV The Reliability of God’s Promises - Hebrews 6:13-20

The author picks up where he left off before this warning. When God made the promise to Abraham He swore by Himself, since he could swear by no one and nothing greater, He essentially swore by His own character and His own words. Abraham believed Him and patiently waited for God to do it (and he obtained the promise). God then gives a second example in HEB 6:16, an oath is used to settle human disputes and make agreements, and that they are binding. So, in the same way, God, to show us the unchangeableness of His purpose, added an oath as emphasis. By doing this He pointed out two things, His intrinsic, unchangeable purpose and His always true word. So, we take refuge in and trust His promise. (The argument is circular, unless you already know and believe what the Bible says. God will never let you get away from faith.) The promise at issue in Hebrews is not the promise to Abraham, it is the promise of Jesus’ high priesthood. And the promise made not to us, but to Jesus. (Hebrews 7:21-22). As Psalm 110:4 says “the Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a high priest forever.” Jesus is our hope, by God’s promise and by Jesus’ sacrifice. We have Him as an “anchor” for our souls, a sure and steadfast hope and “one” who enters within the veil, (the real Holy of Holys in Heaven), not the copy in Jerusalem. Note that there were two uses for an anchor, one was to hold the ship in the same spot; and, the second was when the ship got into the harbor they would put the anchor in a smaller boat and row a few hundred yards in front of the ship, drop the anchor and pull towards it.

Jesus is our only forerunner, the only one we follow. He is first in everything. We must follow, always moving forward. That means we leave everything else behind. Philippians 3:13 states, “forgetting what is behind and pressing on toward the upward call of Christ.” We don’t go back to our past lives or practices. We move forward. Jesus is the only mediator and high priest for us that there is. He secures the grace and help in our time of need. All that God gives us, all we need, is found in Jesus. We need nothing else to grow and to live.

V. The Intentional Inadequacy of the Old Testament Law and Priesthood and the Infinite Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood and the New Testament Law of Christ – Hebrews 7

The Mosaic law was never intended by God to apply after Jesus' death and resurrection because it was inadequate to solve the problem of sin, it was "perfectly imperfect". God's plan has always been to replace the Mosaic Covenant. (Jeremiah 31:27-4, Hebrews 8, Galatians 3:24-4:11)

The Mosaic system of "expiation" (covering sin, not paying for it) only avoiding the temporal consequences to Israel, the nation, in its relationship with God. The New Testament "propitiation" (satisfying God's wrath) through Jesus eliminates the eternal consequence of sin. When the perfect and permanent comes the imperfect and temporary passes away. Going back is not even an option.

Hebrews 7 explains how Melchizedek was the Type of Christ. Melchizedek's name means "King of Salem (peace) and King of Righteousness". He was a priest of God having neither beginning nor end. He blessed Abraham, not vice versa, and Abraham gave Melchizedek 10% of his spoils from war (Genesis 14:18-20). Hebrews 7:4-10 notes the Mosaic priests were still "in" Abraham, meaning yet to come as his descendants. This meant Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, a priest forever and a type of Christ. He likely was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

Hebrews 7:11-17 discusses the intentional imperfections and temporal nature of the mosaic Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic law, and, mandates the need for Jesus to be from the tribe of Judah and from the order of Melchizedek and to replace them. Jesus' indestructible life is a perfect and permanent replacement for the Old Testaments priests. The text notes that when the priesthood is changed the (Mosaic) law must also change, Hebrews 7:12. The text goes on to discuss that the Mosaic Law was "weak and useless" and is set aside since it made nothing perfect. This means we have new laws (the New Testament commands) for a better hope. Jesus guarantees a better covenant and, since Jesus continues forever as a high priest and made a once-for-all sacrifice, he saves forever and always lives to pray and advocate for us.

Note: Hebrews 7:26 states that Jesus was "separated from sinners". That does not mean distance but emphasizes that he "knew no sin". The Mosaic Law was the first step, it was given to make us aware of our sin and need for a savior. ("Romans 3:20") As GAL 3:24 points out, the law was our "tutor" until the time came for Jesus, who is the solution and the substance. New wine requires new wineskin, a dispensation administration suitable to the times.

Because of this change we no longer hope in temporal promises; we don't seek to rule the world or control the government (Jesus will rule and clean up the culture when he returns); we don't claim Old Testament promises made to Israel and we don't follow the Mosaic law. We have the New Testament promises and commands. The Old Testament was grace for a nation, temporally. The New Testament is grace for individuals, spiritually and eternally.

VI. Observations

1. A good start does not guarantee a good finish. The group of primarily Jewish Christians in the book of Hebrews had already accepted joyfully the seizure of their property, been imprisoned, shown mercy and sympathy for prisoners, loved and endured reproaches, persecution and a great conflict of sufferings. (that's a lot) But, over time, they went back to the synagogue to escape persecution. Their expectations weren't being met by their experience. When that happens, you will either adjust your expectations, which is good, or adjust your faith, which is bad. They did not abandon Jesus, but they made the New Testament "a la carte", i.e., multiple choice. Put another way, they had a selective faith. Without realizing it, their return to the synagogue was the equivalent of what had happened in the exodus desert at Kadesh Barnea and, in doing so they risked God's promises. So do we, if we ever back off from fully following Jesus and the New Testament commands, no matter what our reasons. Why would you if you really believe the Bible? Jesus is all you ever need, no matter what you are going through. As Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare His own son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things." The answer is obvious. You can't go back to anything or at any time.

There is a difference between disobedience to God's word and disregarding God's word. I fail when I disobey, but, if I disregard, I don't care, and that equals rebellion.

2. Jesus is not just better, he is the whole point. Ephesians 1:10 "in (Jesus), with a view to administration suitable to the fullness of times, the summing of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and on the earth."

2 Corinthians 5:15, "...and He (Jesus) died for all, so that who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him"; 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things passed away behold new things have come."

New Testament Christianity is a radical change. The cross does not give us a minor shift or two relating to a few ethical, moral or religious values. He takes over our lives. The cross radically disrupts the very center of your life, from self to Christ and from my will to God's will. It was always about Jesus, He was the whole reason for creation, to display God's grace. He is the perfect way and the only mediator. All God offers is ownership, slavery to Him. He does not accept part time help or independent contractors. You were bought with a price.

Today there is a misconception that every individual in the body of Christ is free to determine what their relationship with Jesus looks like. Without saying it out loud, they think they can set the terms for the relationship. Nothing in the Bible supports this; to the contrary, if you think that, you have no biblical reason to think you are going to heaven. Luke 14:25 – "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

John 12:25 – "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life will keep it to life eternal."

Luke 9:62 "But Jesus said to him, 'no one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

1 Peter 1:13 "Therefore prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Hudson Taylor said we need to renounce all earthly prospects and be utterly at God's disposal, suffer anything; and be wholly devoted to God's will and cause. Simply put, you need to be willing to do anything, give anything and go anywhere, for God. This is the least common denominator for those in a relationship with Christ.

Jesus doesn't save people who only want to go to heaven, He saves those who are willing to renounce all rights to themselves and completely surrender to Jesus' leadership. You must want Him to be Lord of your life without reservation. Jesus is Lord of All or not Lord at all. There is nowhere in the Bible that says you can tell God "no" and have a relationship with Him. You are pilgrim and God expects you to act like one. (1Corinthians 7:29-31; Luke 14:33).

3. Christianity is not a passive faith, like Hinduism. It is active, a path you walk on and in. We have to obey and do things; we have obligations. We have to go through the sanctification process. Where there is justification, there is sanctification, dying to self. We must constantly seek to change, to become more Christlike; never stop growing, renewing our minds, killing sin, repenting from sin, knowing God better, knowing His word better and ministering (evangelism and equipping). In Matthew 24:46, Jesus warns that we better be found doing what He told us to do when He comes to get us. Do not procrastinate if you want to be with Him in heaven. As a mentor of mine said in doing distance events, "keep putting one foot in front of the other and stay upright".

4. Jesus' High Priesthood means you are personally responsible for all of the obligations in the New Testament. You report directly to God and you answer directly to God. It also means you are individually His priest, and as a group, a kingdom of priests. It is who you are; your identity. Just like being His slave. So, you represent men to God, God to men, and you offer sacrifices, not animals but a broken and contrite heart, your body as a living sacrifice; you lose your temporal life to gain eternal life; you exercise self-denial and take up your cross; you give your life in exchange for others; you offer the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God.

If you are not acting like a priest, what makes you think you are a Christian? Laymen are God's plan to do the ministry in the New Testament, Ephesians 4:12.

You must personally master the Bible, one book at a time, one chapter at a time and one verse at a time. You can do this. John 14:13 – "when he, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth." ; Acts 21:32 – "And now I commend you to God, the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."; 2 Timothy 2:15 – "Be diligent to present yourself as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth." (Note that this is a command.)

Get in the Bible directly, the Holy Spirit will do His part. You have to show up. God will provide you teachers if you need them and men you can disciple and witness to; you just need to get in the game. Major on the New Testament Epistles. You can understand the Bible, better and better, if you apply it. (James 1:22 "Prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves."; John 14:21 "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love and we will disclose ourselves to him."

Devotionals, footnotes, commentaries, paraphrases, books on the Bible and teachers all have their place, but the bulk of your time should be spent in the Bible itself, the original words. Only God and His Word cause growth.

Remember in the garden Adam dealt directly with God, Abraham communicated directly with God, Moses had a direct relationship with God, David had a direct relationship with God and you must have a direct relationship with God and His Word. In heaven, it will be you directly communicating with God. This has always been the plan, you – God; you – God’s word. The Reformation was about putting God’s word directly in layman’s hands to read it for themselves (as it admonishes throughout the Bible). The apostles and Jesus warned about false teachers and false profits. They assumed laymen could know the Bible well enough to spot error and heresy with the Holy Spirit’s help. We must be sober, alert and discerning enough to look at the fruit of our teachers and to spot false teachers and untruth. There are a lot of false teachers just as there are a lot of bad financial planners, bad contractors, bad lawyers, bad scams...how do you avoid them? In John 10 Jesus says his sheep know his voice and stranger they simply will not follow but flee. Stay in the word and dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Do your job.