

Hebrews 5:8-14 "Be Doers Of The Word, Not Just Hearers"

This portion of Scripture follows the point the writer of Hebrews has made on several occasions, that Jesus Christ is none other than the eternal God whose priesthood, though typified in both the priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek, is not of earthly origin.

Jesus, [The Son] as we're told in the beginning of this letter, "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by [the word of His power]. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (HEB 1:3)

HEB 1:6 "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

And so, in this letter we have the contrast of Jesus being very God and also truly man as He was born into this world. And so our writer wants us to see both sides of our Savior without losing sight of the fact that He is still only one person. The humanity of Christ and the Divinity of Christ may be a mystery to us, but it is true none the less and we should appreciate both and glory in His coming into this world to become one of us so that we might be one with Him in Christ.

It was in His ministry of High Priest that He fulfills His mission for the Father and that is to secure salvation for His people. But to do this He, as a human, had to fully obey the Father's will which is why we read in HEB 5:8-9 "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

The question has been raised, how can the perfect Son of God learn anything at all, let alone through obedience? This is where an understanding of both His Divinity and manhood comes into play. Keep in mind that it was man who was commanded to obey God perfectly in the Garden of Eden. It was man who disobeyed and learned for the first time of the horrors of sin.

And now, Jesus Christ, as a man, must also obey as the first man failed to do. Through His perfect obedience as one of us, He is eligible to represent us as our substitute for sin, though He committed no sin.

But His obedience, unlike ours, is always, without exception, to do the Father's will and to always please Him. In doing the Father's will, even from childhood, He grew as a man through the same experiences we encounter in life. Though Jesus is fully God and is omniscient, knowing all things, there was a sense in which He learned first-hand as a man. Prior to his incarnation He was Spirit. As man He grew, not only physically but emotionally and mentally in the sense that all of His human-ness was new from a personal experiential stand-point.

This is why the Holy Spirit records for us in LUK 2:52 "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Unlike you and I who need discipline to bring us into subjection at times so that we might obey, Jesus never resisted to disobey the Father.

John Calvin makes the comment about Christ learning obedience through suffering in the confines of the flesh. He said, "Not that He was driven to [obedience] by force, or that He had need of being exercised, as the case is with oxen or horses when their ferocity is to be tamed; for He was abundantly willing to render to His Father the obedience which He owed." No, He declared, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (PSA 40:8) "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. (JOH 4:34)

<A.W. Pink points out what obedience really is and how that was a new experience for the Son of God in the flesh. He says, "Obedience is subjection to the will of another: it is an owning of the authority of another; it is performing the pleasure of another. This was an entirely new experience for the Son. Before His incarnation, He had Himself occupied the place of authority, of supreme authority. His seat had been the throne of the universe. From it He had issued commands and had enforced obedience. But now He had taken the place of a servant. He had assumed a creature nature. He had become man. And in this new place and role He conducted Himself with befitting submission to Another."

Christ's obedience was for our benefit. It was His perfect obedience in perfect righteousness which was put to our account which we claim as our own through faith in Christ. Our Lord's obedience is what enables you and I to say to the Father, 'we have fulfilled your perfect will, Father. We have obeyed perfectly so as to gain our salvation.'

The only difference is we didn't actually do it ourselves. We simply lay hold of what someone else did on our behalf and make it ours by faith and confess our need to have someone else stand in our place and accomplish for us what we couldn't accomplish for ourselves. This Jesus did as the Son of Man. What He did, by identification, we did, being identified or baptized into His perfect atonement through faith in Him alone.

And this is exactly what Paul meant when he said in ROM 6:3-6 "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless that we should no longer be slaves to sin -"

Baptism is another way of saying identification. We are identified with what Jesus did for us and the beauty of this salvation is that the Father accepts it as payment for our sins, once for all.

But not only are we identified with His perfect righteousness, He was also identified with our sinfulness. This is what F.F. Bruce points out in his commentary. "He associated Himself publicly with sinners, that was something which He was going to do throughout His ministry, until He was numbered with the transgressors on the cross."

Sometimes we lose sight of the importance of the "O" word. Obedience is often seen in such a negative light these days because it flies in the face of everything sinful men want to do. And yet if obedience was not played out in the life of Christ you and I would still be in our sins.

Andrew Murray puts it all into perspective when he says, "Obedience is the very essence of salvation." And by inference Murray suggests that obedience must be in conformity to the will of God. In fact, he continues: "The living center around which all the perfections of God cluster, the living energy through which they all do their work, is the will of God. The will of God is the life of the universe; it is what it is because God wills it;

..... His will is the living energy which maintains it in existence. The creature can have no more of God than he has of God's will

working in him. He that would meet and find God must seek Him in His will; union with God's will is union with Himself. Therefore it was that the Lord Jesus, when He came to this world, always spoke of His having come to do one thing, the will of His Father."

Now this brings up a very important point for you and me. If we are to be imitators of Christ whose whole life was dedicated to doing the Father's will, then it would make all the sense in the world for us to do the same.

You'll notice in verse 9 of our text... HEB 5:9 "and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him..."

Our obedience is essential in our salvation, which is to say, in all things we should be desiring to do the Father's will as opposed to our own. Now we need to be careful not to get the cart in front of the horse at this point. When we talk about obedience on the part of God's people as being essential for their salvation, we are talking about two different aspects of the one truth of obedience.

The first aspect of obedience has to do with obeying the command from God's will to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. This is exactly what Pink points out when he says, "The obedience of this verse is an evangelical one, not a legal one: it is the obedience of faith (as found in Rom.16:26). So also in ACT 5:32 "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." But this obedience is not to be restricted to the initial act, but takes the whole life of faith."

And this is the second aspect of obedience for the believer in Christ Jesus. Our initial obedience is to repent and believe as the Holy Spirit regenerates us and enables us to believe, but guess what happens after we believe? We move in the Spirit of Christ. And what does the Spirit of Christ desire to do? The same thing Christ desired to do; the will of the Father in obedience to Him.

This is why it makes no sense to say on the one hand that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and yet have no desire to do His will by loving Him above all and following Him wherever He leads as we depend on His Spirit for grace and strength to do that.

If our Savior's greatest desire was to do the will of His Father, then what should be our desire after we've been given the greatest gift the Father could give us in His Son? This is why Murray states

what seems to be an indisputable fact of the church at large. "It is to be feared that there are many Christians who seek salvation, and have no conception in what salvation consists, being saved from their own will, and being restored to do the will of God alone."

This is what our sanctification is all about. Sanctification is our cooperation through faith and obedience with the Holy Spirit who desires to make us more like Christ which is another way of saying we are practicing holiness. And the only reason we can practice holiness is because we have life and in life comes the fruit of that life which is holiness.

That's why the writer of Hebrews can make the statement in HEB 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." This is essentially what Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount in MAT 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

He's not talking about the pureness of the natural man's heart. The natural man's heart is as Jeremiah said in JER 17:9 "deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" No, Jesus was talking about a heart touched by God which has reached out to God by faith. Only God can make the heart pure in the sense that He makes it anew and creates new life and new desires, not the least of which is to do God's will instead of our own..

Before we move on to the next verse let me just quickly make a comment about the phrase in HEB 5:9 "and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation..." Jesus Christ did not become perfect through sufferings. He has always been perfect, being God. What that phrase speaks of is having completed His work for the Father, He became the source of eternal salvation.

The Greek word for *made perfect* could better be translated *consummate or complete*. But having completed or perfected His work in this world He and He alone became the source of eternal salvation. The word *source* could also be translated *cause* or *author* of eternal salvation.

This too should excite every believer because our salvation, unlike the promises of men in this world, is forever. It's a theme we see repeatedly in this letter.

In Heb.9:12 he speaks of eternal redemption, Heb.9:15, eternal inheritance, Heb.13:20, eternal covenant, and this is so because as

F.F. Bruce says, "it is based on the sacrifice of Christ, once for all accomplished, never to be repeated, and permanently valid."

And for all who through faith, obey the One who obeyed even unto death on a cross, we too will have this eternal life. But what we see next in our text is an interesting summation of how the Father accepted the sacrifice of Jesus who presented His own sacrifice as our High Priest.

HEB 5:10 "and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek."

This statement is different from that made in verses 5 & 6 which speaks of God calling and ordaining the Son to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. We read Jesus was "designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." (HEB 5:10)

The reason this is important is because it speaks of God accepting what Jesus accomplished as our High Priest. Verses 5 & 6, according to A.W. Pink, "signifies to ordain or appoint. The word in verse 10 (which is *designate* in the NIV and the NAS) means to salute or greet."

Pink then goes on to make the connection as to its importance in the light of this thought from our writer. He says, "it is essential to observe carefully the exact point at which this statement (in verse 10) is introduced: it is not till after the declarations that Christ had "offered up" in v.7, had "learned obedience" in the same verse, had been "made perfect" and had become the "author of our eternal salvation" in verse 9 that we are told that God saluted Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.....

He continues, "This act of God's [salute to Christ] followed the Savior's death and resurrection. It was God's greeting of the glorious Conqueror of sin and death."

The writer seems to be caught up in this glorious fact of how the Savior is accepted by the Father and given the recognition He deserves, but instead of continuing to expound on it he pauses to make a very abrupt and yet important point about the spiritual condition of those whom he has been teaching.

HEB 5:11 "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn." The NAS puts that last part of verse 11 in this way. "You have become dull of hearing."

Evidently, there was a problem with these readers of which the writer of Hebrews was aware. In fact, it was such a problem that he stops his teaching at this point on the High Priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchizedek and backs up as though he's lost them.

And he may have, because the problem had to do with their impaired ability to understand spiritual things. And part of the answer is found in the writer's description of them in spiritual terms, "dull of hearing, slow to learn." The Greek word for dull or slow here is *nothros* and it means sluggish or lazy.

It would seem they became complacent in their faith and this is very easy for any of us. Complacency is usually the result of something being familiar to the point where we take it for granted. This kind of attitude can produce laziness in our ability to walk with Christ as soldiers of the cross.

But the other problem with this dullness or sluggishness of attitude is that it does impair our ability to hear and walk in what we hear. This is what James brings out in his epistle.

JAM 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Dullness of hearing doesn't mean we can't hear and take in information, it means an inability or unwillingness to act on what we've been told by the Lord in His word. And this is where the deception comes in and this is where our spiritual eyes and ears do become dull and sluggish which affects our ability to grow in grace and truth.

Dr. J. Brown makes this comment: "To be dull of hearing is descriptive of that state of mind in which statements may be made without producing any corresponding impression, without being attended to, without being understood, without being felt. In a word, it is descriptive of mental listlessness. To a person in this state, it is very difficult to explain anything; for nothing, however simple in itself, can be understood if it be not attended to."

This is true. To a person who's not interested in the truth of the Lord in a particular area of his or her life the truth seems to go in one ear and out the other. You can explain something in great detail to someone and they may even be nodding their head and twenty minutes later what comes out of their mouths is directly

opposed to what they just heard. And our first reaction to such a thing may be, 'is anybody home?'

And so, our writer essentially asks that very question and then he takes it to the next logical step when he says in HEB 5:12 "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"

This is quite an indictment. And keep in mind that many of these Jewish believers may very well have been around a long time in the Lord; some may have actually been around during our Lord's earthly ministry. Don't forget that the first believers at Pentecost were primarily Jews.

This is why we don't want to automatically equate length of years in the Lord with an equivalent maturity in the Lord. Many times we see how both will work together. But there are many Christians who are 5, 10, 15 or more years in Christ who are, in practice, still crawling or taking baby steps.

This is not the way it's supposed be and our writer points this out. Now when he says that by this time you ought to be teachers he may very well be zeroing in on potential leaders in the Body of Christ who are still "taking" as we all do, but by this time should be "giving" something back to the Body.

But I don't think this is limited to just potential teachers or leaders. Not everyone is equipped, or gifted, to be in a teaching ministry in the church, but everyone should be able to teach those things which they've learned about their faith. And by this I mean able to encourage someone in the faith with the truth of God's word.

It may be something as simple as pointing out what God says on a particular subject that someone is struggling with. It may be being an example in your life where others can see how you are teaching by actually walking in the Lord in His power. Example is a great teacher. But teaching shouldn't be limited to only a silent witness. Teaching may at times be a vocal encouragement or exhortation.

There are many ways we can be teaching, but the point here is the contrast between immaturity and maturity in Christ and how that affects our witness and our usefulness in the Body.

Instead of being mature in their faith our writer says, "you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"

Now, before we get the idea that once we get the gospel of Jesus Christ we can leave that behind and move on to the more meaty stuff of our new life, let me just say that when our writer speaks of the elementary truths of God's word he speaks of those things which we needed in the very beginning to bring us to the throne: repentance, faith, a turning away from self and embracing another who can give life eternal.

The solid food we read about in verse 12 actually consists of the elementary teachings. But those elementary teachings are expanded upon. It's really the same picture viewed from a different angle. It's the same Savior and salvation seen from a heavenly perspective. The more we see the more we grow.

In fact, this is exactly our writer's point. What has he been teaching them up to this point? He's been teaching them the elementary principles on an elevated level. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is one very important aspect of our salvation. And then he adds to that by introducing the priesthood of Melchizedek. He's building upon a foundation which may be basic in nature but allows our faith to be built strong as we learn more of our Savior and grow in His truth and grace.

When we dwell on the meat of God's word we will mature and be useful to others. The opposite effect happens when we find ourselves struggling with the elementary principles. Here's how Pink puts it: "Instead of living in the joyous assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, many give way to doubting. They question their interest in Christ; they wonder, 'Am I His, or am I not?' They are continually occupied with self, either their good self or their bad self....."

..... And thus their peace is at an end. Instead of affections set upon Christ, their attention is turned within, occupied with their faith or their lack of it. They are fit only for the kindergarten. They require to be told once more that faith looks away from self, and is occupied entirely with Another. They need to be told that Christ, not faith, is the sinner's Savior; that faith is simply the empty hand extended to receive from Him."

Now, we've all needed to be reminded of this in our lives whether we're mature in Christ or not. But there should be a progression to where we are not constantly living in those doubts and crippling fears which the enemy uses to get a foothold and keep us from being useful for Christ.

Our writer tells us in HEB 5:13-14 "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

As an adult you and I cannot live on milk. Milk is designed only for infants to live on for an extended period of time. But the problem is that many Christians desire to live on milk instead of solid food in a spiritual sense. And part of the reason is that they are not acquainted with the word of righteousness.

This phrase, "word of righteousness" as Pink points out, "has to do with the Gospel of God's grace. In 1Cor.1:18 it is termed "the Word of the cross," because that is its principal subject. In Rom.10:8 it is designated "the Word of faith", because that is its chief requirement from all who hear it. Here, the "Word of righteousness, because of its nature, use and end. In the Gospel is "the righteousness of God revealed" (Rev.1:16,17), for Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness unto everyone that believes (Rom.10:4)"

It's not as though the readers of this letter were utterly devoid of the word of righteousness, but they were, as the NIV puts it, "not acquainted' with it. That phrase in the Greek is one word and it means "inexperienced in."

In other words, they were hearers of the word of righteousness, but when it came to living out the word by faith they were not effectual doers. They were not experienced in living by faith, instead they were experienced in living by feelings and as such they were ineffective and babes in their walk.

Verse 14 puts it into perspective.

HEB 5:14 "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Solid food is the whole counsel of God's word. But it doesn't become solid in practice until we get it past the brain and into the heart.

Lot's of people gain knowledge and appear to know the solid food, but their lives show they continually are crawling like infants, even after many years of knowing Christ. The truth is they are still trying to live exclusively on milk. Solid food is meant to be used constantly. And in this constant use by faith and obedience we can

train ourselves to walk in the full armor of God and at that point we will not be moved.

In all of training in life it takes discipline and a conviction not to turn back. If you've ever gone on a diet you know what I mean. It's not that a diet of eating right in the right portions doesn't work, it's that our discipline and conviction of not going back to the old ways isn't followed through on.

So it is with our spiritual lives. It's often easier to go back to the old ways instead of putting off the old and continually putting on the new. But as we practice these truths we will have our senses trained to discern good and evil. True discernment doesn't come from simply gaining knowledge. True discernment comes from walking in the light by faith and practicing what we know so that we can become mature and then be much more able to help others in their walk.

I'll close with a quote from A.W. Pink ... Our progress comes from "using the light we already have, putting into practice the truth already received, which fits us for more. Unless this is done, we [move backward], and the light which is in us becomes darkness. Manna not used breeds worms (Ex.16)! Milk undigested, not taken up into our system, ferments. A backslidden state deprives us of a sound judgment. The secret of "senses trained to discern good and evil" is revealed in Hos.6:3, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."

May His grace stir us up to do so as we seek Him continually by faith."