

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 9

Hebrews 4:12 – 5:10

Hebrews 4:12 [NIV] *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

The main point of this passage of scripture is that the Word of God has come to humanity and the Word of God is such that it cannot be ignored and disregarded by any human being for ever.

2 Corinthians 5:10 [NIV] *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

Every human being will have to stand before the judgement seat of Jesus Christ at some time.

How will we be judged?

Revelation 20:11-12 [NIV] *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw **the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.** Another book was opened, which is the book of life. **The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.**”*

Note that “books” – plural were opened up to these people who were brought back to physical life. These were people who had never before had these books opened to them.

The Greek word is “biblos” and refers to the books of the Christian Bible.

What these resurrected people had done in their lives was judged by the contents of the Christian Bible, the “biblos.”

All these people were for the first time being exposed to God’s Word, the Christian Bible, and shown how they should have conducted their lives, and for the first time given the opportunity to repent, believe the gospel message and be “born again” to a new way of life.

The book of life was also opened and as they lived this new life their names were recorded in that book affording them eternal life.

Revelation 20:13-14 [NIV] *“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and **each person was judged according to what he had done.** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”*

No human being who has ever lived was overlooked, no matter how or where they died.

Revelation 21:3-4 [NIV] *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. **There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,** for the old order of things has passed away.”*

After this period of judgement there will be no more death, sadness or pain for all who remain will have eternal life as their names will have been recorded in the book of life.

Central to all this is the Word of God, the Christian Bible.

The contents of these books will be the standard by which all judgements will be made.

Now we can see why the Word of God cannot be ignored or disregarded, our chance of eternal life will depend on how we respond to its commands and promises.

Jews always regarded a word **not** as a sound, but as a power.

This is profoundly true, for over and over again in human history the spoken word of some leader or thinker has gone out and accomplished things.

John 1:1-4, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

We must remember the Word of God also refers to Jesus Christ, who will be the One on the throne making the final judgements.

Notice the use and power of words in the physical creation of this universe.

Genesis 1:3 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:6 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:9 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:14 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:20 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:24 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:26 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

Genesis 1:29 [NIV] *“And God said.....”*

When people begin to take God seriously they immediately realise that God’s Word is not only something to be studied, it is not only something to be read, it is not only something to be written about; it is something to be acted on.

God’s Word is penetrating both our physical life [Greek word “*psuchē*”] but also our spirit [Greek word “*pneuma*”].

All living things have “*psuchē*” but only human beings have “*pneuma*” spirit life, the “*human*” spirit.

Job 32:8 [NIV] *“But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.”* [Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11].

It is this “*pneuma*” that allows human beings to think, plan and make personal choices.

It is by the Holy Spirit entering into our life, “*pneuma*”, that the fruits of that union, the very characteristics of God, begin to form in our lives.

Genesis 1:26 [NIV] *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

The “*image*” part of our creation makes us a shadow of what God is like, [the Hebrew means a shadow **not** the real thing but recognisable in a limited way to what is casting that shadow]. This is our “*psuchě*.”

Genesis 2:7 [NIV] “*the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**, and the man became a living being.*”

The “*psuchě*” then received the “*pneuma*”, spirit life.

John 20:22 [NIV] “*And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*”

Jesus Christ as our Creator in the Garden of Eden now breathed on the disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit to join with their “*pneuma*” spirit.

The power of the new spirit was not released until the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-4 [NIV] “*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*”

The Holy Spirit coming to these same men but now with great power as Jesus Christ had promised.

It is the Holy Spirit in us, sent by the Word [Jesus Christ], that scrutinises our thoughts [Greek “*enthuměsis*” our emotions covered by our feelings and passions]; also our attitudes [Greek “*ennoia*” referring to our intellect and will.]

Hebrews 4:13 [NIV] “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*”

We may put up a façade for other people to see and judge us, but our Creator God sees through this outer dressing and we stand naked before Him as He judges us by His Word, the Christian Bible.

Nothing can be hidden from God.

He knows about everyone, everywhere, and everything about us is wide open to His all-seeing eyes, [Psalms 139:1-16].

God sees all we do and knows all we think, even when we are unaware of His presence, He is there.

When we try to hide from Him He sees us. We can have no secrets from God.

It is comforting to realise that although God knows us this intimately, He still loves us.

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV] “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*”

“*Therefore*” – whenever we read this word we need to review what has been written just before the scripture that is about to be revealed.

Because there is no hiding place from God.

Because our sins and weaknesses are all known to God.

We desperately need a high priest to intercede before God on our behalf.

The writer of Hebrews first stresses the sheer greatness and absolute deity of Jesus, the very Son of God as well as the Son of Man.

Jesus is great in Himself not great by honours conferred by human beings.

“Gone through the heavens” – the atmosphere that surrounds the earth, the space that is beyond, and into the very presence of God.

The Jewish physical high priest did the same in small measure on the Day of Atonement, when he took the sacrificial blood from the outer court of the Tabernacle, through the inner court, right into the Holy of Holies, the symbolic presence of God. [Leviticus 16:1-34]

Hebrews 4:15 [NIV] *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.”*

Jesus is able to totally identify with human beings having personally experienced the many limitations that we have.

The fact that Jesus was without sin means that He knew, as a human being, the depths, tensions and assaults of temptation which we will never know and never can know.

So far as His battle against temptation being easier it was immeasurably harder.

Why?

We fall to temptation long before Satan the tempter has put out the whole of his power, we are easily vanquished.

Jesus was tempted as we are and far beyond what we are ever tempted.

Satan put everything he possessed into the assault, because of who Jesus was, our Saviour. Yet Jesus withstood these assaults.

This experience of Jesus had three effects.

1 It shows us that God can totally relate to our being human.

God is Holy, and the root meaning of Holy is to be different.

God belongs to a completely different sphere, He is spirit.

This makes God completely detached from human experience.

Jesus, the Son of Man [100% human] as well as the Son of God [100% God] bridged the gap between humanity and God.

2 It shows that God is merciful.

Humans cannot approach God because of His perfection and holiness, so God to show His mercy had to come down to the level of human beings.

God perfectly understands human nature so He can be completely merciful to our condition.

There is **no** part of human experience of which God cannot say *“I have been there.”*

3 It proves to us that God really can help with our human problems.

The best person to give us advice and help on our journey of life is someone who has travelled the road before us.

God has done that through Jesus Christ His Son.

Hebrews 4:16 [NIV] *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Because of this knowledge we can confidently approach the throne of God and open up our heart, our thoughts and our concerns to Him knowing that He does understand.

God can extend sympathy, mercy and power towards us.

Jesus Christ brought God to humans and He can bring humans to God into a loving relationship.

Hebrews 5:1-6 [NIV] *“Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. No-one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” And he says in another place, “You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

The writer of Hebrews expresses **three basic thoughts about the office of a priest.**

1 A priest is appointed on our behalf to deal with things concerning God.

It is as if people say to those who are ordained to the ministry, we want you to be set apart from day-to-day tasks of earning a living, to be able to go to the secret place of God and come back with a message from God.

A real priest is the link between humans and God.

In Old Covenant Israel the priest had the additional function of offering sacrifices for the sins of the people.

Sin puts up a barrier between humans and God, the priest’s sacrifice was meant to restore the relationship.

2 The priest must have gone through every human experience to be able to sympathise with all human beings.

A priest must be completely involved in the human situation, knowing the heights and depths of life to be able to deal gently with those whose weaknesses lead them astray.

The Greek word translated “deal gently” means the ability to bear with people without getting irritated and annoyed with them when they are foolish and when they will not learn, making the same mistake over and over again.

This is an expression of patience that gently leads a person back to the right way of living.

3 A priest must realise he cannot appoint himself to the priesthood.

The priest’s appointment is of God.

The ministry among human beings is neither a job, nor a career, it is a vocation and a calling.

Even Jesus Christ the Son of Man did **not** take on the office of high priest Himself. He was appointed by God the Father.

Hebrews 5:7 [NIV] *“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”*

Jesus was in great agony as He prepared to face death on the cross.

Luke 22:41-44 [NIV] *“He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”*

Although Jesus, the Son of Man, cried out to God, asking to be delivered, He was prepared to suffer pain, humiliation and even separation from His Father at the point of death, in order to do God's Will.

At times we also will undergo trials, **not** because we want to suffer, but because we want to obey God.

If we feel that our prayers are not being heard by God be sure that these prayers are made in reverent submission to God, willing to do what God wants, not our own desires.

Hebrews 2:14-15 [NIV] *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil —and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

The fear of death, which was real and very painful Jesus shared with the rest of humanity, so that by His resurrection we can be freed from the fear of death.

Psalms 23:4 [NIV] *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

Jesus has been “through the valley of the shadow of death” and made it a prelude to resurrection and glory.

This is how He frees us from the fear of death.

Frees us from this power that Satan has over all humanity and uses to force people to yield to Him.

Luke 22:3 [NIV] *“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.”*

Satan entered into Judas and used him to bring about the death of Jesus the Son of Man, and thought Jesus' death was a great victory for him.

Satan was blinded himself, as he has blinded the vast majority of human beings at this time, to the prophecies that pointed to Christ's death being turned into a victory through His resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up*

together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

Our only hope beyond physical death is the resurrection, as Christ in us causes us to be resurrected, even if we die before His return.

So no human being need fear death.

Paul calls it “*sleep*” and we all know and expect to wake up when we go to sleep.

Hebrews 5:8 [NIV] *“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered”*

Jesus’ human life was **not** passively following a script that had been given Him, although He was well aware of what the prophets had foretold.

John 10:17-18 [NIV] *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

The life and death was one that he chose freely.

Jesus Christ’s life was one continuous process of making the Will of God the Father His own.

Philippians 2:5-8 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!”*

Jesus chose to obey even though He knew exactly what pain and humiliation would be involved.

Hebrews 5:9 [NIV] *“and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”*

Jesus Christ was always morally perfect as God.

How then was Jesus made perfect?

The Greek word translated “*perfect*” is “*teleioun*” which is the verb of the adjective “*teleios*”.

To a Greek a thing was “*perfect*”; that is “*teleios*”, if it had perfectly carried out the purpose for which it was made and designed.

Jesus the Christ through His birth, as a human being who could shed blood, His life as an example of God’s power and compassion, then His death and shedding of His life-giving blood, followed by His resurrection **completely fulfilled the reason He, as the Word of God, became a human being.**

Jesus became “*teleios*”, perfect.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Jesus did this perfectly.

Hebrews 5:10 [NIV] *“and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”*

Our personal salvation is totally dependent on the work of the now resurrected Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, as our High Priest.

Psalms 110:4 [NIV] *“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

This office for the Son of God was part of the original plan of God to have children created in His “likeness”.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a full account of this office of high priest that Jesus the Son of Man holds in **chapter 6:20** onwards after a very important digression to help us fully understand the need for the Jesus Christ as our High Priest.