

The Book of Hebrews

Part XI: The Overwhelming Power of Grace (Heb. 4:15 – 5:11)

I. The Word Made Flesh

We have looked intently at the *Logos of God*—the Word that declares our beloved sonship, which cuts like a sword through our being. Jesus and his work of redeeming his holy brothers and sisters *is* the Word of God. This is the confession we’re called to take hold of. Our High Priest who stands in the heavens on our behalf has settled this matter.

The next verse continues with this in mind...

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(Hebrews 4:15-16)

Mercy and *grace* connect to the “two-edged sword” of verse 12. Earlier, we saw how the depths of our hearts are laid bare before God—yet his fiery eyes gaze into us with compassionate mercy. In those same eyes, there is grace that empowers us to rise into our true self (see Titus 3:11-12).

In other words, “mercy” speaks of how we are compassionately forgiven of sin while “grace” empowers us to live according to our true nature, which Christ came to reveal and redeem.

This brings us back to a key part of the good news that was briefly brought up in chapter two. As our Representative, Jesus reveals the true destiny of human flesh. This ties in with the words of the apostle John:

14 And the Word (*logos*) became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1:14)

Jesus as the Logos of God took on human flesh. This is the same flesh (“*sarx*” in the Greek) that Paul sometimes refers to in negative terms in his letters; however, it doesn’t always mean something negative. It simply describes our physical being. At times, Paul uses this word to speak to a legalistic mindset that focuses on outward things instead of the Spirit. It can also speak to a self-focused life.

- See Philippians 3:3-4 and Galatians 3:2-3. 5. See also Romans 8:4 in the context of 5:20, 6:14, and 8:1-3.

Our flesh is not evil. It is a vessel for divine incarnation. Unfortunately, deception (false “words”) can cause evil to be incarnated through it. Either way, the flesh remains a neutral entity.

Jesus did not take on some kind of superhuman flesh. He took on regular flesh. He was just as human as we are, subject to the same weaknesses and temptations, yet without sin. Therefore, his representative life revealed that human flesh was designed to be a temple of glory, a garden of life, a promised land of the Spirit.

This is vital because many believers think their physical being has evil in it, which they then use to excuse sin in their life. It is true that the physical body is impacted by decay and death (which is why we will receive a new body one day), but the “sinful nature” has been completely crucified with Christ. Sin is not our true master. Jesus revealed and redeemed (Romans 6).

This is why the sword of the Gospel brings both mercy and grace. **Mercy** forgives us for deeds done in the flesh that were borne out of deception and idolatry. Meanwhile, **grace** sets us free to be who we truly are as an image-bearer and child of God.

This is the two-edged power of the gospel in our lives. We are completely covered and forgiven. God does not see our sin or even remember it. And at the same time, we are not doomed to stay in a sin-filled life. Our flesh is a vessel for righteousness, and this is our inheritance *now*.

34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

(1 Corinthians 15:34 NKJV)

6 Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin ... 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus ... 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

(Romans 6:6, 11, 14)

Because of the grace of Christ, we are free from the sinful nature—the “old self”). Our nature has been redeemed. Sin was a lie mankind fell into, but now we are forgiven and given grace to walk in godliness.

To sum up this facet of Hebrews 4: **Jesus is not an example for us, but of us.**

II. Reinforcement for the Storm

This passage says we are invited to draw near to the throne of grace so that we can receive mercy and find grace **to help in time of need**.

The word for “help” is *boetheia*, a term used for something very specific—frapping a ship. Frapping is when a ship is reinforced with chains and ropes to keep it from falling apart during an intense storm. This word is used only one other time in Scripture, when Paul was on a ship caught in the middle of a nor’easter:

**17 After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables (*boetheia*) in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.
(Acts 27:17)**

This is a beautiful way to understand coming to the throne of grace and what it releases. The storms of pressure and temptation—whether temptation to doubt, fear, or make an ungodly choice—can leave us feeling helpless to overcome. But coming to the throne of grace is where we receive the divine revelation of our victory in Christ.

First of all, coming to the throne implies trusting that Jesus has *sat down* on that throne because he finished his work of redemption. As we trust this in the heart and confess it with the mouth—celebrating God’s loving mercy and his grace toward us—we are empowered. We receive divine support that keeps us above the waves.

This revelation pierces us and keeps us in both peace and purity. If we forget who we are and fall into a trap of sin or fear, there is a merciful love ready to quickly pick us up and keep us moving forward. Guilt and condemnation do not need to linger a moment in our souls. At the same moment, we’re also empowered by grace to walk in our true identity.

Secondly, coming to his throne is also simply about trusting that Jesus is a real Friend who is really there, and he is waiting and ready to strengthen us in the midst of pressure, fears, and temptations. We come to him in prayer, knowing he will provide support.

III. The Foundation of Our Calling

After bringing this amazing word of encouragement, the writer continues to unpack the reality of our High Priest, a major point he has been continually building upon...

1 For every High Priest was chosen from among the people and appointed to represent them before God by presenting their gifts to God and offering sacrifices on their behalf.

2 Since the High Priest is also one who is clothed in weakness, he humbles himself by showing compassion to those who are ignorant of God’s ways and stray from them. 3 And for this reason, he has to not only present the sin offerings of others, but also to bring a sin offering for himself. 4 And no one takes this honor upon himself by being self-appointed, but God is the one who calls each one, just as Aaron was called.

5 So also, Christ was not self-appointed and did not glorify himself by becoming a high priest, but God called and glorified him! For the Father said to him,

***“You are my favored Son.
Today I have fathered you.”***

6 And in another Scripture he says about this new priestly order,

***“You are a Priest like Melchizedek,
a King-Priest forever!”***
(Hebrews 5:1-6 TPT)

These words refer to the earthly High Priests of Israel. The letter is still speaking to people familiar with this concept and is using the Old Testament to affirm Jesus’s position as the true High Priest.

It says that Jesus did not appoint himself into this position (just as the earthly High Priests never appointed themselves). He was called by God. The writer then quotes one of the times this calling came forth in scripture. In Psalm 2, a prophetic poem about the Messiah, God refers to this coming King *as his Son*.

On that note, it’s important to pause and see how sonship is the foundation of Jesus’s priestly calling. This demonstrates how knowing you’re a son or daughter of God is your greatest calling. Every other “priestly” task from God flows out of this.

We see this reflected in Jesus’s baptism (Mark 1:9-11). Before he began his ministry, God affirmed Jesus’s identity as a beloved son first.

Jesus would go on to remind the disciples about this reality when they started to step out in the power of the Spirit:

18 Jesus replied, “While you were ministering, I watched Satan topple until he fell suddenly from heaven like lightning to the ground. 19 Now you understand that I have imparted to you my authority to trample over his kingdom. You will trample upon every demon before you and overcome every power Satan possesses. Absolutely nothing will harm you as you walk in this authority. 20 However, your real source of joy isn’t merely that these spirits submit to your authority, but that your names are written in the journals of heaven and that you belong to God’s kingdom. This is the true source of your authority.”
(Luke 10:18-20 TPT)

For Jesus, the Jordan River was a prophetic experience from the Spirit confirming his own sonship with a sign and wonder. Therefore, Jesus had both the written word (Psalm 2 calling him a “favored Son”) and a prophetic experience from the Spirit affirming his identity.

God wants the same for us. We always have the written Word of Scripture to stand upon, but God will also give prophetic confirmations from his Spirit to affirm our identity as well. It's important to embrace both elements in our life.

IV. The Obedience of *Faith*

After this affirmation of Jesus's sonship and calling, the author quotes another Psalm that mentions the order of Melchizedek. We will cover the meaning of this significant name later in the letter; for now, let's focus on the next few verses of Hebrews 5 where we are given one of the most intimate looks at Jesus's victorious battle with temptation, pain, and suffering...

7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.
(Hebrews 5:7-10)

The phrase "*He was heard because of His piety*" can be translated more literally as "*He was heard because He **took hold well.***" The word for *piety* literally means to "take hold of something well," which is why it is translated as devotion or piety. However, reading this literally fits in better with the overall context of the letter.

Throughout the letter, we are being called to "take hold" of our confession of righteousness and sonship. The root of this word is found in the phrase "**receive** mercy and find grace." This is exactly what Jesus modeled *well*. He took hold well of his identity as a beloved Son—and his calling as a Priest. This firm grip on God's Word caused him to experience breakthrough in prayer.

The word for *obedience* literally means "listening." Again, the context of this letter shows that this is better translated as Jesus learned through suffering to "listen" to the *Word* of his Father (the One who once spoke in fragments but *now* speaks in the language of sonship). Although Jesus was a Son, he learned to trust and listen to the Word through the things he suffered.

One of the times he suffered and was tested was in the wilderness. This happened after he was confirmed by the written word and the Spirit as a beloved Son. He then had to learn to cling to that Word even when the enemy came and made him question his identity, tempting him to disbelieve God's promise (and to fulfill his priestly calling in the wrong way).

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."
(Matthew 4:3)

Jesus trusted the Father, showing us that “obedience” is about trusting the Father’s word over our lives no matter what, even if we’re driven to tears sometimes because of the painful opposition that comes to God’s Word over you.

Obedience is about trusting the Father’s heart toward us no matter what. This is what the apostles were assigned to bring to the world:

5 Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake.

(Romans 1:5)

Christianity is about an obedience of trust. It is not obedience to a religious law—to rules; do’s and do not’s. It is a different kind of obedience. It is listening to the voice of love and affirmation, the voice declaring our righteousness and forgiveness, and the voice that declares our calling and destiny as priests to the world who reveal this Word to others.

Now, there is something powerful and stabilizing about this kind of obedience that energizes us to make the correct decisions in other matters of life. Keeping the “rules” (or at least the spirit of the rules) flows naturally out of us as this in place.

When the text says Jesus was “**made perfect,**” the author is using a term for finishing or completing something. Jesus uses the same term to describe accomplishing his goal at the cross (see Luke 13:32 & John 4:34). So, this is not saying Jesus became morally perfect through suffering. It means he finished his work and kept a firm grip on God’s Word all throughout the journey.

This shows us how suffering does not make us holy. Suffering teaches us to trust in the One who already made us holy.

Because he finished the work, Jesus is the source of an eternal salvation to all who *listen to* (“obey”) him... We are now holy sons and daughters. It says later in Hebrews (10:14) that we have been “*made perfect*” in Christ. We were crucified and raised with Jesus, and now our calling to trust the Father’s Word no matter what. In times of temptation or persecution, we come back again and again to the throne of grace to find mercy *and* empowerment as divine reinforcements.

And Jesus shows us we do this through persistent and passionate prayer—though it is not the passion God answers, it’s the heart behind the prayer trusting that we are his beloved kids.

Follow-up Encounter:

Prepare to take communion.

Ask the Lord to speak to you about the “obedience of faith.” Where is the tempter attacking your identity?

*Ask for God’s mercy to be revealed in any area you have given into the tempter. Then, ask for the immediate grace-revelation of your identity. Recall the truth that **your flesh is not evil**. It is a vessel of glory. That means you are a vessel of FAITH! You are not a doubter, but an overcomer in Christ.*

Confess this as you take communion, and then share with others what God is surfacing in your heart during these meditations.