

Hebrews Talk 5 – The way to Christian Maturity

Warning 1 2:1-3 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
WARNING 2 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
WARNING 3 (6:4-8) 6:10 Love, 6:11 Hope, 6:12 Faith
6:13 – 10:21 Central argument: The basis of our faith
10:22 Faith, 10:23 Hope, 10:24 Love WARNING 4 (10:26-31)
WARNING 5 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;
WARNING 6 (13:9) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings

The central section of Hebrews is aimed at established the basis for Faith in Jesus Christ with a view to bring the church to maturity. The author does this by describing in great detail the role of Jesus as the great high priest who offers himself

Righteousness in Hebrews

Heb 5:11-14 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is *unskilled in the word of righteousness*, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

What is this word of righteousness?

Heb 10:37-39 For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; (38) but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

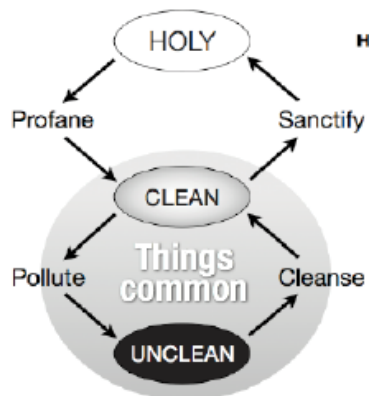
Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Righteousness/justification is by faith. The word of righteousness is.....

In Romans 3:21-26 Paul describes how we are justified by faith through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus which redeems us from sin. However, when the author of Hebrews describes the high-priestly work of Jesus he is not concerned with how his sacrifice achieves our justification. He does confirm that the death of Christ effects our eternal redemption (9:12) sanctification (10:10, 14, 29) and the forgiveness of sins (9:26), but rather than focus on these aspects, the goal of his presentation is to demonstrate how Christ's sacrifice brings us to perfection.

Sanctification in Hebrews

The most basic definition of Sanctification (holy, saint and sanctified all translate variations of the same word) is simply to be "set apart", usually for religious purposes. People or objects can be sanctified, that is, set apart for God's special purposes. Sanctification is not purification, but purification is necessary for sanctification, and the two ideas are so closely linked that they can often be used almost synonymously. For example, in Heb 10:10 we read "And by [God's] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The purifying action of the blood of Christ sets us apart to be God's people to do God's will.



<https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-gospel-of-purity-for-unreached-peoples>

Sanctification is not perfection (mature, complete, finished, fulfilled). Sanctification is a necessary precursor to perfection, because perfection is to do with fulfilling our God given design, potential and purpose, for which we must first be sanctified (set apart). Perfection is a necessary process following sanctification, for if we are to fulfil the purpose for which we have been set apart we must become all that we can be.

In Hebrews sanctification is both something that has been achieved for us (past) by Christ's death and something that is being worked in is now (present and future). As described above, sanctification goes hand-in-hand with perfection.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (11) For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

Heb 10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Sanctification can be applied individually or communally:

Exo 19:5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; (6) and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

This will once again challenge our individualistic worldview, and has some profound implications. If an entire community can be sanctified, such as the nation of Israel and the Church, then faith is not a precursor to sanctification, as in any such community there will be individuals without faith. The one without faith, who refuses to listen to God's word, can defile the entire community.

Heb 10:26-29 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Covenant in Hebrews

Covenant is never explained in the Bible. It is such a common part of life in the ancient world that it is assumed knowledge and an integral part of their worldview which we do not share. The word covenant appears about 350 times in the Bible.

The basic features of a covenant relationship:

- A relationship established by a blood oath
- Blessing is the default position in a covenant relationship
- Curses are only ever the removal of the blessings
- A covenant relationship can only be ended by the death of one party

Types of biblical covenant:

- Promissory covenant (Gen 15)
- Obligatory covenant (Deut)

The ancient concept of the threshold covenant

- The threshold/cup/bowl/basin
- Established in a blood oath
- Stepping over the threshold
- The blessings of the covenant relationship
- The curses of a broken covenant relationship

Exo 12:21-23 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. (22) Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin (threshold), and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. (23) For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

1Sa_5:4 But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. (5) This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

Zep 1:7-9 Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. (8) And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice— "I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire. (9) On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud.

Covenant is integral to the central section of Hebrews, where the word appears for the first time in 7:22 and is then used 16 times before the next warning passage in 10:26-31.

The mysterious Melchizedek

7:1-10 The strange figure of Melchizedek (Gen 18)

- King and Priest
- Blessed Abraham (with gifts of bread and wine)
- Names mean King of righteousness
- King of the city Salem (Peace)
- Without beginning and end
- Greater than Abraham (7:7)
- Greater than Levi (9-10)
- Prefigures the Son of God (7:3)

Psa 110:1-4 A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." (2) The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. (4) The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Pointing the way to Christian maturity/perfection

The church of the Hebrews is far from mature/perfect. The love-hope-faith faith-hope-love chiasmic structure which frames this central section are like steps leading down from the lofty heights of perfection, which the author of Hebrews aspires to for the congregation, down to the first step – faith – from which they are encouraged to look up towards the perfection to which they are called. The goal of this section, then, is to re-establish them in faith by describing the saving work of Christ.

This central section is itself structured as a chiasm, with "perfection" an integral part of that structure:

A 7:11 If perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood

B 7:19 The law made nothing perfect

C 9:9 Perfect the conscience

D 9:11 The perfect tabernacle

C¹ 9:14 Purify the conscience

B¹ 10:1 The law... can never... make perfect

A¹ 10:14 By a single offering he has perfected

This central section should answer these questions:

Why couldn't the Levitical priesthood lead Israel towards "perfection" (maturity/fulness)?

Why is it that the law makes nothing perfect?

How does Jesus the high priest bring his people to perfection?

Levitical Priesthood	Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office • 7:27 ...those high priests... offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people • 7:28 ...the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests • 8:5 For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." • 10:11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. (25) Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. • 7:26 we have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. • 7:28 the word of the oath... appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. • 8:1-2 we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, (2) a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. • 10:12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,
Old Covenant/Law	New Covenant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rom_3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Heb 5:12-13 ... by this time you ought to be teachers... unskilled in the word of righteousness • 9:9 gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper (because...) 9:13 ...the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh • Heb 10:1-2 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. (2) Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? (3) But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heb 8:10-12 I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts... (11) And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (12)... I will remember their sins no more." • 10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. • 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The summary statement:

Heb 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

- Sin gone forever
- Law written on our hearts (Rom 5:5)
- Consciences purified
- Sanctification is forever, beyond the sanctification of the flesh

The logic of Hebrews summed up in Paul:

Rom 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by **faith** into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in **hope** of the glory of God. (3) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, (4) and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, (5) and **hope** does not put us to shame, because God's **love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.