

The words “Let us labor” (v.11) really have the thrust of “be diligent.” This is a needed warning against hypocrisy. We can sometimes fool others as to our faith but don’t try to fool God! Hypocrisy is an abomination to Him. And the final end of both the self-deceived or negligent lost is no better than that of the defiant lost. People can even fool themselves. But the loving God is faithful. He has given us the ultimate tool to test our faith and reality, the Bible, His inspired Word. These familiar verses about the sword easily roll off our tongues but do they penetrate the heart. Doubt’s? Get into the scriptures. Pray. Ask God to expose and remove any hidden perversity. He will. Don’t attempt to allay doubts or validate personal salvation by busyness at good works, or even in studying about scripture. Be prayerfully in the Scriptures daily. Let the Spirit use His sword to test one’s heart. Then one can ably use the defensive armor provided in the Word with the sword of the Spirit against Satan’s attacks, Ephesians 6:17. It is the only offensive weapon in the believer’s armor laid out for us in Ephesians 6.

Verse 12 incidentally provides an insight into the makeup of us human beings. We learn we each have within our bodies two unseen components, soul and spirit. They are humanly inseparable from each other. But both together are sadly separable from the flesh and blood body that harbors and sustains them. Our bodies provide the physical medium for human interactions with one another and God on this earth. If they leave the body it dies.

The sword of the Spirit can divide one’s soul from one’s spirit. This enables my spirit, the part of me that communes with God, to do so without the emotional and willful interference of my soul — my mind, will and emotions. It also enables me to govern my soul (the part of me that I have in common with animals). Humbly believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus as my own Savior through His death on the cross and that God has raised Him from the dead I have become a New Creation. Now God’s Spirit communes with my spirit assuring me I am His,

Romans 8:16 *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

Once engaged with God my spirit delights to engage my soul, my mind, will and emotions in hearty worship and service for the Object of our affections beyond all others.

Our spiritual communion with God is normally through words, His inspired word and us praying. It can also be through silent direct thought transfer and rarely dreams and visions. Such communications should always be tested against the scriptures for the Spirit will not contradict or deny Himself. Whatever way He chooses to communicate, clearly we seek His will instead of our own. Instead of my own human wisdom and reasoning I receive His wisdom and understanding. Walk with Him! Indulge and enjoy!

Now the focus shifts back to the High Priest. This position is referred to seventeen times in Hebrews. The first

two we have seen already.

Hebrews 2:17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

3:1 *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;*

He became like us so He could make reconciliation for our sins before the Holy God Who sent Him to do so. Now He assists us when tried or tempted. He speaks to us as God’s Apostle (sent One) and God’s High Priest. As such He enables our approach to God, our communion with God, God’s communion with us and the loving fellowship of the saints with one another. We learned in chapter 3 that, in contrast to Moses, Christ, as Son, has successfully built and established God’s house on earth. He has taken possession of it and is managing it. And He is personally serving us, the occupants, in the role of Great High Priest. He is there for us with infinite sympathy for our infirmities. He has “been there, done that!” He has felt as no other man has (or could) the utter infirmity of the human race and the personal infirmity of each individual that has ever lived. Sympathy for the lost sinner but no sympathy for sin. Though He was tempted in all points like as we are, and for all of His life and walk here below, it was always without sin. There was no response arising from within Him that He had to resist. He is sinless, therefore a High Priest now worthy and acceptable indeed before God. What a blessing to have Him representing our interests before God who delights in Him. And He personally brings God’s mercy and grace to us. Make no mistake, being Divine did not insulate Him from human feelings. Indeed He felt our human infirmities more deeply than any sinful human could, He Himself being unhardened by the deceitfulness of sin. What a deep well of sympathy He is. Come boldly. Draw encouragement and refreshment from Him. For His mercy and grace are sufficient for every need. Mercy that bore what we deserved and grace to bless, though we are totally undeserving. We may glibly quote this passage but the deep reality will be made good to every believer at some point in life. And so we are drawn nearer, to know Him and to feel known in deeper ways. With some this occurs many times, but the inexhaustible supply does not dwindle, nor is it held back or given in measure because of repeated need by the same person. The wording is beautifully emphatic using the negatives to emphasize the inexhaustible blessing available. We don’t have One who cannot! We have One that can and will. Come boldly to the throne of grace.

Mark 9:24 *Lord I believe. Help thou my unbelief.*

(Note: We have a similar exhortation to come boldly within the veil in Hebrews.10:19.)

Next the author proceeds with a careful and detailed examination of the new Priesthood and the new Great High Priest he has introduced, replacing that headed by Aaron. This is of great interest to Jewish believers for they had an immense adjustment to make. They were steeped in the Old Testament scriptures, the Law, which were the God given basis for all the beliefs and religious practices of their ancestors under Moses. Not only this but they had accumulated many traditions ostensibly intended to uniformly interpret and enforce difficult passages of the Law. These additions took on the force of law even though they were mere additions of men's wisdom, and as such forbidden by the Law, Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32. Furthermore they displaced the Priest's dependance upon direct communication with Jehovah through the mysterious Urim and Thummim he possessed. The role of the Priest was delineated in Malachi.

*Malachi 2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

Now the writer systematically takes the reader through all of the questions an earnest Jew might raise, answering them using the very Old Testament Scriptures the questioner reveres. In the process he deftly draws his readers near to the One Whose priesthood far transcends that established by the Law of Moses. Nearer than normally experienced by Old Testament believers although some, like David, approached very near to Jehovah with mutual delight. As the reader progresses though the Epistle the old system will almost unconsciously be let go — replaced by the new, one that is far better. Nevertheless the intricate detailed explanations may seem unessential to the casual Gentile reader who comes upon Hebrews in his daily reading. (Similarly the Old Testament prophets may seem to be outside of the direct interests of a Gentile believer, but if pursued they provide many insights into God's personality, ways, and Plan.) Dig deeper. We will be rewarded for we will see Jesus in ways obscured to us otherwise.

First the purposes, function and duties of the High Priest are presented — common knowledge to the Jewish reader, but perhaps quite educational to us Gentile readers. The high priest's job is simply to present to God gifts and offerings acceptable to Him on behalf of the common people. They depend upon him to do this for them. In particular he brought offerings for sins as prescribed in the Law of Moses. He also brought free will gifts in worship and thanksgiving. He stood between God and the common Israelite who was not permitted to personally present any offerings he would bring. This distance was decreed by God but may have come about because of the initial fearful response of the people to the terrifying Voice they heard at

Mount Sinai when God Himself audibly first gave them the Ten Commandments. They cut off direct communications begging Him not to speak directly to them again. So He went though Moses and then more routinely though Aaron the first high priest spoken of here in Hebrews 5:1.

Being human and sinful himself this High Priest could have compassion on the ignorant and those that had strayed from the path. He was to function as a shepherd. He had a real position and real essential functions. Yet he was more, for he was a model, a type (although imperfect) of the Great High Priest to come, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

This Aaron, and all of the High Priests descended from him down though the ages, was a sinner. He had to offer for himself before he could offer on behalf of others. This was an obvious intrinsic shortcoming in his priesthood. But, apparently it was not often noticed or at least conveniently overlooked both by the current priest and the people. But with a little thought they would have to see the transitory anticipative nature of the sacrifices and offering presented daily year after year. This inherent weakness in the system, and in those designated to carry it out and perpetuate it, is systematically exposed here in this epistle to the Hebrews.

Next the reminder. Our Great High Priest is not a mere descendent of Aaron, the first High Priest under the Law. While Aaron had a long succession of descendants who became High Priest in their time none of them has bodily passed through the heavens. Aaron's body is still resting, buried on the mountain just outside the Promised Land. where he died in the presence of Moses and Jehovah fourteen centuries before Hebrews was written, Numbers 20:28. No priest of Israel ever passed bodily through the heavens into Heaven. The two men to do so historically, Enoch and Elijah, were not part of the Aaronic priesthood. The Great High Priest now in Heaven for us is unique and clearly of an order extraordinarily above the Aaron's priesthood. Yet He is also uniquely suited to commiserate with our feeling of infirmity for He has experienced the same, without sin.

Next the writer states the obvious, the position of High Priest was a high honor among men and before God. Although some men aspired to it because of the power and prestige associated with it, only God can designate who He wants to approach Him as a priest. Men can't take the priesthood upon themselves nor bestow it upon another in any age. Aaron didn't. Neither did Jesus Christ. Yet many pagans and "Christians" do so today. Is their "priesthood" valid? Is it effectual?

More on God's Priesthood next.

By Ron Canner, January 14, 2009