

## THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

### HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

#### INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
    - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
    - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
    - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
    - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
  2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-10:18)
    - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
- B. Review of Hebrews 4:1-13
1. R. Kent Hughes, *Their experience of Christ was not living up to expectations. Instead of rest, there was turmoil. They had given up their ancient religion but were suffering for their new faith. To some it seemed that the initial experience of rest was a cruel delusion. . . It is to these endangered hearts that the writer now focuses his remarks in chapter 4 as he instructs and exhorts them on participation in the rest of God.*
  2. Douglas Mangum, *The way to “make every effort” to enter God’s rest is to let God, through his powerful word, instill and foster a deepening faith in Christ’s mediating work, a theme to which the next paragraphs return.*
  3. Raymond Brown, *Whether he likes it or not, man is moving to his destiny. The message of one who has gone before as pioneer and priest is a word of immediate relevance. Christ’s essential work for man has been effectively accomplished. Our part is to hear, believe, obey and share this word of abundant life.*
- C. Comments on Hebrews 4:14-10:18
1. William L. Lane, *The fearful prospect of judgment that is held out to the community in vv 11–13 is balanced by the reminder of the high priestly ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.*
  2. R. Kent Hughes, *The writer believes that Jesus’ high priestly ministry, on behalf of the believers, correctly understood and implicitly believed, will be a great anchor in the coming storms.*
  3. Warren Wiersbe, *The central theme of Hebrews is the priesthood of Jesus Christ, what He is now doing in heaven on behalf of His people. Is the high priestly ministry of Christ superior to that of Aaron and his successors? Yes, it is. . .*

### HEBREWS 4:14-16, A SUPERIOR CONFESSION

- A. The writer declares the importance of maintaining our superior confession (14d), *let us hold fast our confession.*
1. *let us hold fast*
    - a. Again, the writer includes himself in the group of those who need to remain faithful.
    - b. *hold fast*
      - 1) It means to remain closely united to someone or something.
      - 2) Hebrews 10:23, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*
      - 3) Thomas Constable, *Notice that this verse does not say that since we have such a High Priest we will hold fast our confession. Perseverance in faith and good works is not inevitable, though perseverance in salvation is (2 Tim. 2:12–13).*
      - 4) Zane Hodges, *Only once previously (2:1–3:6) had the writer referred explicitly to the priesthood of Jesus, though it was implicit in 1:3, but now he was preparing to undertake an extensive consideration of that truth. But before doing so, he wished to suggest its practical relevance to his readers whom he exhorted to “hold firmly to the faith.” They had to know that the priesthood of their Lord offered them all the resources they needed.*
      - 5) Thomas Constable, *Notice that this verse does not say that since we have such a High Priest we will hold fast our confession. Perseverance in faith and good works is not inevitable, though perseverance in salvation is (2 Tim. 2:12–13). Since we have such a High Priest we must be careful to hold fast our confession.*

2. *confession*

- a. Louw-Nida, *to express openly one's allegiance to a proposition or person.*
- b. 1 Timothy 6:12, *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*
- c. William L. Lane, *The crucial issue for the community is whether they will maintain their Christian stance. . . The appeal for adherence to the confession has the function of promoting the faithfulness of the community at a time they were displaying a lack of concern for spiritual integrity and steadfastness. . .*
- d. Warren Wiersbe, *These Hebrew Christians were tempted to give up their confession of faith in Christ and their confidence in Him (see Heb. 3:6, 14). It was not a matter of giving up their salvation, since salvation through Christ is eternal (Heb. 5:9). It was a matter of their public confession of faith. By returning to the Old Testament system, they would be telling everyone that they had no faith in Christ (see Gal. 2:11–21). This kind of unbelief would only bring reproach to Christ's name.*
- e. B. F. Westcott, *The writer everywhere insists on the duty of the public confession of the faith. The crisis claimed not simply private conviction but a clear declaration of belief openly in the face of men.*
- f. Raymond Brown, *This is not merely an appeal for endurance but an exhortation to fearless witness. Don't be robbed of your faith; advertise it. Hold it fast and hold it forth.*
- g. Charles Spurgeon, *Shall we desert Him now that He has gone into heaven to represent us now that He has fought the fight, and won the victory on our behalf, and gone up to heaven as our Representative? God forbid!*

B. The writer reviews our superior confession (14-15)

1. It is a confession of who Jesus is (14)
  - a. He is a great high priest (14a), ***Since then we have a great high priest***
    - 1) *Since then* is tied to the participial clause, *let us hold fast our confession*, that which preceded gives reason why we should *hold fast our confession*.
    - 2) Buist M. Fanning, *The picture of Jesus Christ as High Priest is the most distinctive theme of Hebrews, and it is central to the theology of the book.*
    - 3) Raymond Brown, . . . *Christ is described as a great priest. He far surpasses all of his priestly predecessors. Their priestly work cannot possibly be compared with his in its range, nature, cost and efficacy. He alone is truly 'great.'*
    - 4) Romans 8:34, *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*
  - b. His greatness is based on Who He is (14b-d)
    - 1) He is fully man (14b), ***Jesus***,
      - a) The writer gives the human name of our great high priest, Jesus.
      - b) Raymond Brown, *There is a man in heaven; he understands us and knows our trials.*
      - c) Hebrews 2:17, *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*
      - d) Douglas Mangum, *The author makes the logical point that the Son had to be made like humanity in every way in order to serve as the faithful high priest who makes atonement for their sins. This sharing in their humanity is the necessary means by which he could mediate salvation for them and the cleansing of their sins through his death.*
    - 2) He is fully God (14c), ***the Son of God***,
      - a) William Barclay, *He is great in his nature, not by worldly honours or by any external trappings but in his own essential being.*
      - b) Charles Spurgeon, *There is His deity. He is the Only-begotten of the Father: as glorious in His Godhead as He is gracious in His manhood.*
      - c) Raymond Brown, *His deity, as well as his real humanity, is a central theme in this epistle. The letter began by asserting it, continues by proving it and goes on to expound it. It warns of the danger of denying it and rejoices throughout in the inspiring assurance which comes through affirming it.*
    - 3) He is one person with two natures (14d), ***who has passed through the heavens***,
      - a) Donald Hagner, *This indeed is no ordinary high priest. He is the man Jesus, but also the unique Son of God, the one who has gone through the heavens.*
      - b) Donald Hagner, *This last clause may be an allusion to Christ's presence in the spiritual or "heavenly temple" where his priestly work is accomplished (cf. 6:20; 9:11–12).*

- c) James Moffatt, *The greatness of Jesus as [great high priest] consists in his access to God not through any material veil, but through the upper heavens; he has penetrated to the very throne of God, in virtue of his perfect self-sacrifice.*
- d) R. Kent Hughes, *To dramatize the greatness of Christ's priestly ministry, the author contrasts it with the ministry of the Levitical high priest who once a year passed from the sight of the people into the Holy of Holies bearing the blood of atonement. In contrast, Jesus, our high priest, passed once for all from the sight of his people at the Ascension to the ultimate Holy of Holies, having shed his own atoning blood . . . And there he sat down (something no high priest had ever done!) because his atoning work was finished. He remains at God's right hand, making intercession for us.*
- e) Warren Wiersbe, *When He ascended to the Father, Jesus Christ passed through the atmospheric heavens and the planetary heavens into the third heaven where God dwells (2 Cor. 12:2). How much better is it to have a High Priest who ministers in a heavenly tabernacle than in an earthly one!*

2. It is a confession of what Jesus does (15)

a. He can sympathize with our weaknesses (15a), ***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,***

- 1) Charles Spurgeon, *He does not forget us now that He has passed through the lower heavens into the heaven of heavens, where He reigns supreme in His Father's glory. He is still touched with a feeling of our infirmities.*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *Having explored the concept of Jesus as a faithful high priest (3:1–4:14), the writer proceeded next to develop the idea that Jesus is a merciful high priest in the service of God (cf. 2:17). . . He can sympathize (feel and suffer) with us when we experience temptation. The writer's point was that Jesus understands us, He sympathizes with us, and He overcame temptation Himself.*
- 3) Raymond Brown, *No-one on earth, before or since, has ever been through such spiritual desolation and human anguish. For this reason he can help us in our moments of temptation. He is aware of our needs because he has experienced to the full the pressures and testings of life in this godless world.*
- 4) R. Kent Hughes, *Hold tight to your confession of Jesus, he urges, because he is capable of unparalleled understanding and sympathy. . . the assertion that God is not only a Father, but has such sympathy that he enters the suffering of this world, was, and is, absolutely staggering. It is impossible for us, with our heritage of Biblical revelation, to appreciate how revolutionary the idea of a sympathetic God was.*

b. His sympathy is based on the fact that He was fully tempted like us yet He remained sinless (15b), ***but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.***

- 1) C. S. Lewis, *We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. . .*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *His temptations did not come from a sinful nature as some of ours do since He had no sinful nature, but He suffered temptation as we do.*
- 3) Ray Stedman, *For centuries, Christians have debated the question, Was Jesus not able to sin because of his deity, or was he simply able not to sin even though he fully shared our humanity? This question is, in my judgment, one of those issues about which no final answer can be given due to the limitations of human knowledge and the reticence of Scripture to speak. . . Luther once observed, "When the angels want a good laugh, they read the commentaries!" Let us not add to their laughter by quarrels over things beyond our knowledge.*
- 4) Raymond Brown, *Naturally when this letter says that Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are our writer is not thereby implying that within his lifetime Christ encountered every possible different temptation. He could hardly have experienced personally the specific temptations peculiar, for example, to women, to married people, to the elderly, to those made redundant in a time of economic recession or to those who live in a modern technological society. Yet at the root of the different temptations encountered by men and women throughout the wide range of human experience there are a number of basic trials or tests, and Jesus certainly knew what it was to meet these and emerge victoriously from the struggle.*
- 5) R. Kent Hughes, *The method for the unparalleled sympathy of God was, of course, the incarnation of his Son in human flesh. . . He lived with a human body, mind and soul—with all their limitations, except for sin. . . It is a fact that if you have two pianos in the same room and a note is struck on one, the same note will gently respond on the other, though not touched by another's hand. This is called "sympathetic resonance." Christ's instrument was just like ours in every way. And hear this! He took that instrument, that body, to Heaven with him. It is his priestly body. And when a chord is struck in the weakness of our human instrument, it resonates in his! . . . Do you want sympathy? Do not go anywhere else. Dare not go to anyone but him!*

- C. The writer exhorts Christians to confidently draw near the throne of grace (16)
1. We are to stay close to our High Priest (16a), *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace*,
    - a. *then*
      - 1) It means *therefore, a marker of result*.
      - 2) Based on what the writer declared concerning Jesus in the preceding verses, Christians are confidently able to approach God.
      - 3) Charles Spurgeon, *He lays His hand upon each petition, and so leaves the print of the nails upon it, and therefore it must prevail with God*.
    - b. *draw near*
      - 1) It means *coming to, approaching a deity*.
      - 2) Hebrews 11:6, *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*.
      - 3) James Moffatt, *Our writer certainly includes prayer in this conception of approaching God, but it is prayer as the outcome of faith and hope*.
      - 4) Here, it specifies *the place, the throne of grace*.
    - c. *with confidence*
      - 1) It means *boldly, with courage*.
      - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *It means "bold frankness" —an open outpouring of the heart. . . There is no suggestion of disrespect here, but simply that we are to come to God without hesitation or tentativeness. What a contrast with the trepidation of the high priest when he entered the Holy of Holies!*
      - 3) Of course, this boldness is based on grace supplied by the work of Christ.
      - 4) William L. Lane, *Because they have a high priest who empathizes with them they can go with frankness to the throne of grace and receive timely help in their distress. The free right to approach God with bold frankness was given in the sacrifice of Christ. . .*
      - 5) Several verses that give confidence to draw near the throne of God.
        - a) Hebrews 10:19, *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,*
        - b) Ephesians 3:12, *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.*
        - c) Hebrews 7:23-25, *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 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.*
    - d. *the throne of grace*
      - 1) Zane Hodges, *In a book filled with lovely and captivating turns of expression, few excel the memorable phrase "throne of grace." Such a conception of the presence of God into which beleaguered Christians may come at any time, suggests both the sovereignty of the One they approach (since they come to a "throne") and His benevolence.*
      - 2) Thomas Constable, *The high priests of Judaism could only approach God at His earthly throne, in the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple, once a year. God's throne of judgment has become a throne of grace (undeserved help) for us now.*
      - 3) William L. Lane, *In a bold extension of the language of worship the writer calls the community to recognize that through his high priestly ministry Christ has achieved for them what Israel never enjoyed, namely, immediate access to God and the freedom to draw near to him continually.*
      - 4) John Calvin, . . . *Since God has fixed on His throne... a banner of grace and of fatherly love towards us, there is no reason why His majesty should ward us off from approaching Him.*
  2. Our High Priest is the reason we can receive mercy and grace (16b), *that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*.
    - a. A Christian is blessed by drawing confidently to God's throne.
    - b. God's blessing are negative and positive.
      - 1) We have access to His mercy which is not receiving what we deserve.
      - 2) We have access to His grace which is receiving what we do not deserve.
      - 3) Ray Stedman, *Mercy is the remission of deserved judgment, while grace is the supply of undeserved blessing. Both are needed by sinful believers such as we all are, and both are available to us when we come with confidence.*

c. *the time of need*

- 1) Charles Spurgeon, *If it is a time of need, then we see clearly from this verse that it is a time when we are permitted and encouraged to pray.*
- 2) Brooke Foss Westcott, *We receive “mercy” for our past failures and “grace” to meet our present and future needs.*
- 3) Warren Wiersbe, *No trial is too great, no temptation is too strong, but that Jesus Christ can give us the mercy and grace that we need, when we need it.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- William Barclay, *Jesus is the perfect high priest because he is perfectly God, and perfectly one with us. Because he has known our life, he can give us sympathy, mercy and power. He brought God to men and women, and he can bring them to God.*
- William L. Lane, *The ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary as a faithful high priest in the service of God gives certainty to the promise that God’s people will celebrate the Sabbath in his presence if they hold fast their initial confidence.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *If we fail to hold fast our confession, we are not proving that Jesus Christ has failed. We are only telling the world that we failed to draw on His grace and mercy when it was freely available to us.*
- R. Kent Hughes, *Some in that beleaguered little house-church of the first century had allowed the mounting hardships to draw them away from God, rather than closer by prayer. Their confidence was gone. What about you? Has life made you draw away from the throne of grace or draw near?*